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Bill Viola, I Do Not Know What It Is That I Am Like (1986), video still, photograph by Kira Perov. Courtesy the artist.

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58 | FALL 2013

SINCE 78 vol. 1

0			
Ö	Intro	oductio	٥n

- 12 David Curtis
 On the Search for Ideal
 Viewing Conditions
- 18 Maeve Connolly
 Shared Viewing
 Moving Images in the
 Cinema and Museum
- 30 Erica Levin

 Toward a Social Cinema Revisited

 The potential of social media from

 À Propos de Nice to YouTube
- 38 Peggy Gale
 Tipping Point
 Canadian artists, time-based media,
 and performance
- 46 Sean Cubitt
 Angelic Ecologies
 Ideas of environment in the
 works of media artists
- 52 A.L. Rees
 Physical Optics: a return to the repressed
 British cinema artists
 revisit 1970s tendencies

58 Catherine Elwes Visible Scan Lines

on the transition from analog film and video to digital moving image

- 65 Michele Pierson
 The Object of Film Analysis
 What are we describing when
 we analyze film?
- 74 Tobias Putrih, Omer Fast, Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, George Barber, Tina Keane, David Hall, Abigail Child, Henry Hills, Christoph Girardet & Matthias Müller, Tom Sherman, Gene Youngblood
- 89 Gregory Zinman
 Nam June Paik's TV Crown and
 Interventionist, Participatory Media Art
- 94 Mal Ahern
 An Invisible Cinema
 Andy Warhol's Films, In and Out of View







35th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

102 Pavle Levi Experimental Tango

> Appropriation and the photo-book: Milošević's Last Tango in Paris and Marinac's The Passion of Joan of Arc

- 108 Juan Carlos Kase
 Abigail Child and Henry Hills
 Turn Towards the Concrete
- 118 Roy Grundmann
 Experimental Cinema and
 the Crystals of Time
 Matthias Müller's Visual Poems
- 124 James Hansen
 The Fall of Days
 Luther Price's Nine Biscuits (2004-08)
- 130 Christa Blümlinger
 The Double Paths of Nicolas Rey
 On autrement, la Molussie
 (Differently, Molussia)
- 138 Kate Mondloch
 Mirror Mirror
 MIRROR by Doug Aitken

146 Bruce Jenkins
In the Bedroom/On the Road
A Conversation with Sadie Benning
and James Benning

- 156 William Rose
 The Responsibility of Forms
 A discussion between David Gatten and
 Fred Worden on politics in experimental cinema
- 168 Tom Sherman
 Catching up with the Present
 Two Texts to demonstrate the
 'Future' is Behind Us
- 174 Gene Youngblood
 Secession from the Broadcast
 The Internet and the Crisis of Social Control
- 192 Janis LipzinJud Yalkut 1938-2013
- 191 Index of advertisers

INTRODUCTION

Three and a half decades have passed since the first issue of the Millennium Film Journal, which was founded in 1978 to address a dearth of writing and few publication opportunities in an increasingly vibrant, but insistently anti-establishment, field. Needless to say, during this 35 years there have been huge developments in the conception, construction and exhibition of moving images, as well as an explosion of interest in works outside the mainstream cinema by curators, critics, scholars and the non-specialist general public. To celebrate the anniversary, we contacted experts in the field with a deliberately amorphous call for papers, asking simply for a consideration of some aspect of the artists' cinema during the 35 years of the journal's publication. The response was overwhelming.

Much has changed in our area over this period, and several articles in the issue focus on some of these changes. One thing remains the same, however, a problem of particular concern to an editor of the MFJ: the question of nomenclature. Every name applied to our field carries ideological undertones, and each one has been summarily rejected by some practitioners and theorists while embraced by others, for example:

- 'experimental film' . . . but we are not scientists —
- 'avant-garde cinema' . . . but it's not Paris, it's not the 1920s —
- 'underground' . . . I want my work out, not buried —
- 'personal [film/cinema/video]' . . . but investigating the material underpinnings of a moving image medium is not a personal quest —
- 'video art' . . . my medium is photochemical not magnetic —
- 'new media' . . . but what was new is too soon old.

Even "artists' cinema," innocuous and descriptive as it sounds, has been applied in recent years to a sub-genre of the field, as Volker Pantenburg points out in his essay (included in "Since 78, Vol. 2" to be published next Spring in MFJ No. 59) — not so surprising in a way, since the refusal of the artist cloak by some of those who refer to themselves as filmmakers is at least as old as their use of the medium. Each of the terms in the list is essentially disputed — to cite W. B. Gallie's evocative expression first proposed in 1956 — a concept, like 'freedom' or 'justice' that, in its very use, invites disagreement as to its precise application. As editors of the journal, however, we often need to inscribe the area the MFJ is devoted to, and in terms that are inclusive and positive — for example in composing rejection letters for submissions on films by Scorsese or Lynch. We will continue to describe our focus as "artists' cinema," rejecting

the idea that the term belongs only to practitioners, represented by commercial galleries, who attracted attention in the 1990s.

The point is that the territory of artists' cinema is rife with dispute and controversy. As one reads through the contributions to this issue, one cannot miss the multiple disagreements swirling below the generally calm and collegial surfaces of the writings. However, one quality runs through all the texts despite their divergences both explicit and implied: an enthusiasm, a sense of joy and excitement at the vibrancy and aesthetic pleasures of the artists' cinema, at the insights it offers, the questions it raises, and the intellectual challenges in comprehending and analyzing the vast range of works it covers. Such is the nature of the beast, a beast beautiful and healthy in its internal contradictions, its inconsistencies, and its incompleteness. It will be no surprise if this very issue of the MFI generates some controversy. Some readers may feel that one or two of the works discussed have no place in these pages, that we have opened the gates too wide; others that even in the diversity of approaches and subjects, themes central to the field have been ignored or underplayed, that the gates were not opened wide enough; and still others that crucial practitioners, tendencies, or institutions have been omitted, that censorious gatekeepers were implicitly employed in our call for papers. We welcome such critiques, and hope to see them enumerated and detailed in future contributions to the journal. As editors of this issue, on the other hand, we are thrilled at the range of topics addressed, at the arsenal of analytic tools employed, and that many of our most gifted writers have contributed — so many in fact that we did not have space to accommodate them all. A number of articles have been reserved for "Since 78, Volume 2," to be published in Spring 2014, which promises to be as insightful, as controversial, and as broad, if not broader, in its scope.

David Curtis and Gene Youngblood each published his first book at the beginning of the 1970s. Both Curtis' Experimental Cinema and Youngblood's Expanded Cinema were firsts of their kind, radical breakthroughs with far-reaching, long-lasting influence, and as different in style, subject matter and approach as London and Los Angeles. We are thrilled and honored to begin the issue with an optimistic article by David Curtis, and to close it, at the other end of the scale, with an equally optimistic, but starkly ominous text by Gene Youngblood. These are much-appreciated gifts for our 35th birthday.

Lastly, we need to express our deep gratitude to our advertisers: the artists, the institutions, and the companies who have made the production of this issue possible. Please support them if you can. Check out their works, buy their products, attend their classes, use their services . . . and, if it is appropriate, mention the Millennium Film Journal when you do so.

ON THE SEARCH FOR IDEAL VIEWING CONDITIONS



"Going to the cinema results in an immobilization of the body. Not much gets in the way of one's perception. All that one can do is look and listen. One forgets where one is sitting. The luminous screen spreads a murky light throughout the darkness. Making a film is one thing, viewing a film another. Impassive, mute, still the viewer sits. The outside world fades as the eyes probe the screen. Does it matter what film one is watching? Perhaps. One thing all films have in common is the power to take perception elsewhere. As I write this I am trying to remember a film I liked, or even one I didn't like. My memory becomes a wilderness of elsewheres. How, in such a condition, can I write about film? I don't know." Robert Smithson.

Besides the wonderful "wilderness of elsewheres," Smithson's world-weary text gives fine expression to the filmmaking artist's almost universal dissatisfaction with the "impassive, mute" role forced on the viewer as part and parcel of the mainstream cinematic experience. His distaste perhaps also explains his own very brief filmography. Mercifully other artists have battled-on to reverse the power balance between maker and viewer, not least by re-shaping the viewing context, and the 35 year life of the Millennium Film Journal coincides with some of the most momentous changes in this viewer-maker relationship.

Since Smithson's complaint, the context has changed. The moving image, once a scarce, highly regimented phenomenon dominated by Hollywood, now surrounds us in unwanted profusion. It is hard today to visualize an urban scene without a screen flickering within it somewhere, and as part of this revolution, the artists' film is at home in previously unimaginable spaces, such as the permanent-collection galleries of art museums and on the internet. In the first years of film, before purpose-built

> LEFT Screening at La Sala Rossa, Montreal, 2007 (organised by Daichi Saito of Double Negative). Image courtesy Guy Sherwin & Lynn Loo.

¹ Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," Artforum, Sept 1971.



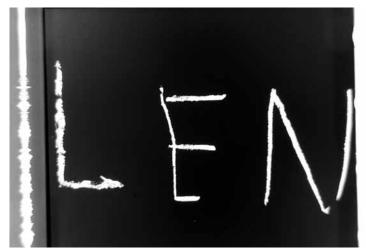
Chamber Cinema (expanded variety) at the home of Bill & Priscilla Moritz, Los Angeles (1969). Courtesy David Curtis.

cinemas as such existed, all filmmakers — Méliès, Cohl, the Lumière cameramen and their contemporaries — had to make positive choices about how and where to screen their silent films. They found space in music halls, circus booths and hired halls, none perfect, but none bringing unwanted expectations of 'film' itself. Maxim Gorky's lyrical account of his first brush with the moving image ('Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows...') was set in Aumont's — a restaurant with a 'dark room' requisitioned for the performance; one can imagine the background noise of dishes clattering. But by the time artists first became seriously interested in film in the 1920s, the situation was different, cinema had become institutionalized. The rise of the narrative film and the building of cinemas to contain it, made inevitable the marginalization of artists' films that lasted for the next sixty years. Only if artists found a niche within the mainstream industry were cinema screenings possible, either as program-filling 'shorts' (as in the GPO-sponsored animations of Len Lye), or as what we would now recognize as 'art-house' features (the privately financed films of Jean Cocteau).

For the rest, it has always been self-evident that there was little possibility of attracting an audience to a cinema when all on offer was a four-minute abstract or poetic film, however gem-like or sublime that film might be. Portable 35mm film-projectors did exist, but there is little evidence that they were widely used by artists, that is beyond such rare novelties as a screening within a live-theater performance (Clair's Entr'Acte within the ballet Relâche). The most popular solution was the still familiar film-club screening where artists could show work to each other and to a small but knowledgeable audience. Increasingly, film festivals and other international forums became crucial to the art-form's circulation and dissemination. When amateur 16mm technology became more widely available, home or studio was often a screening venue for artists' work — and for many it is still their preferred type of space. Of course, none of this activity was likely to generate a proper financial return, and with it, a workable economic system for artists. Moreover, none of it represents the work reaching the full extent of its potential audience.











It was only in the 1970s that artists began to enjoy a real choice of context in which to see their work performed. The expansion of ideas about what art-making might involve, together with the development of new moving-image exhibition technologies — video-recorders, video projection and film-loop projectors — made filmmaking artists think, perhaps seriously for the first time, about the different kinds of environment which might best suit their works.

One doesn't know how frustrated pre-war artists were by their lack of choice; there's not much by way of a written record of their vexations. Would Leger have liked to show his Ballet Mécanique in a gallery alongside his contemporary painting, as now happens?² He may possibly have shown it in his studio, as his collaborators Dudley Murphy and Man Ray were technophiles and perhaps had access to a portable 35mm projector. Would the makers of abstract 'visual music' such as Ruttmann and Fischinger have liked to see their films shown as part of an orchestral concert, as happens now? That some artists were dissatisfied with the options available to them is beautifully illustrated by Maya Deren who in a lecture in the 1960s described her own films as "chamber cinema" rather than experimental or avant-garde film, making a crucial point about scale and appropriate context.3 Implicitly she saw artists' films as small in scale, which like chamber music should ideally be performed to an attentive audience in an intimate space. Chamber films were "poetic, lyric-form, abstract, eloquent," and required small groups of "virtuoso performers, with every note heard individually," not lost within a larger orchestration. This suggests that she would have considered neither the conventional 150-seat cinemaspace nor the busy walk-through of a Tate Modern gallery to be appropriate or satisfying. She was a great film-club advocate, but perhaps the modern habit of watching works at home on TV from a DVD, or streamed directly to an iPad, might also be close to her ideal? Artists today can certainly specify the way in which they want us to view their works and many do, and many can be quite exacting in their demands. But equally, cinema programmers and museum curators, and we as individual viewers, all have a responsibility to consider the context in which an artist's work might be best viewed. Some are major rhetorical works best seen in the presence of an audience; others are pieces for intimate contemplation. Some are clearly designed for the black box, others for the white cube. But many (following Deren) might be candidates for chamber consumption, best seen with a group of friends and a bottle of wine; even alone with an iPad. And luckily, many are flexible and non-specific as to the showing space, and therefore available to all these options.

New technology has given us one huge benefit above all others: the ability to see what we want when we want to see it, much as we have long expected of literature and music. Gábor Bódy's Infermental (1980-91) and other artist-curated video-magazines, were an attempt to create a more intimate and time-flexible viewing context; as were the on-demand videotheques of the 1980s (the London ICA; ZKM Karlsruhe). Pressures from the art-market to limit distribution were a push in the other direction. Museums were slow to help. As they discovered the moving image, museums (with a few limited exceptions, MoMA, the Whitney, the Pompidou), followed the art-market, respecting above all-else the need to keep art scarce, and thus maintain its financial value. Also, for a while, some museum curators and gallerists unhelpfully fetishized the distinction between gallery artists and experimental filmmakers, excluding the latter from the canon, keener to maintain lines of demarcation than to respond to the qualities of the work itself. They forgot to look. All this inhibited the open-minded curatorial curiosity — which can be viewed as the museum-world's greatest gift to the spectator: the ability to illuminate connections between artists past and present, between different art-forms and across cultures. Now, these false boundaries have largely crumbled, silly distinctions are collapsing, and we seem to be entering a more sophisticated age; our art-form is at last growing-up and entering the wider world. The next 35 years could be exciting.

2 I've found very few references to early film-screenings in a gallery. In the early 1940s, Norman McLaren apparently built a (portable?) projection box to allow the new Gallery of Non Objective Painting to show films in the gallery, rather than an auditorium. It doesn't seem to have survived in use for long. (Cecile Starr, "Hilla Rebay and the Guggenheim Nexus," Articulated Light, Harvard Film Archive/Anthology Film Archives, 1997).

3 Lecture at Smith College, April 11th, 1961. She states that she coined the term "chamber film" that year. (Smith being a women's college, her lecture stresses the potential of film as a woman's medium; how pleased she would be to see today's dominance of women in the field, another transformation of the last 35 years.)

David Curtis For 20 years David Curtis was responsible for funding artists' film at the Arts Council of Great Britain. On retirement, he founded the British Artists Film & Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design (2001-). He is author of *Experimental Cinema* (Studio Vista/Universe 1971), A History of Artists' Film & Video in Britain (BFI/U of California Press, 2007) and co-editor of *Expanded Cinema – Art, Performance, Film* (Tate Publishing 2011).

SHARED VIEWING

MOVING IMAGES IN THE CINEMA AND MUSEUM

MAEVE CONNOLLY

TOP Julia Meltzer and David Thorne, Not a Matter of If But When (2006), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist.

BOTTOM Gregg Bordowitz, Fast Trip, Long Drop (1993), screen grab. Image copyright the artist, courtesy Video Data Bank.





At the outset of an essay reflecting upon his Kinomuseum program, curated for the 2007 International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Ian White proposes that "a particular kind of cinema" might also be a "unique kind of museum."1 This museum, he suggests, would be "based upon the principles of impermanence, immediacy, the temporal and the temporary, manifest in the minds of an audience who experience it in the space and time of the auditorium that is the museum's permutating exhibition, and who are its active, defining agent."2 Significantly, in White's account, the audience is conceived as a gathering of bodies as well as minds, and the cinema that he imagines as a museum derives its particularity from the interplay of cognitive and physical dimensions. His essay closes with an account of Fallout, a section of the Oberhausen program that was guest-curated by artist Mary Kelly, in which three works from three different decades were shown in the three auditoria of the Lichtburg cinema.3 Rather than being looped in the manner of a gallery installation, these works were shown sequentially and as each screening ended the audience proceeded physically from one auditorium to the next, so that "the perambulatory space of the gallery collapsed into the organizing architecture and institution of cinema."4

If White presents the relationship between cinema and museum as potentially open to reconfiguration, then other accounts of this relationship have tended to more strongly emphasize the differences, even oppositions, between the two institutions and their characteristic modes of spectatorship and sociality. Rather than attempt to summarize a complex and ever-expanding area of scholarship here, I will focus on just two texts (by Laura Marks and Hito Steyerl) that allude both to the appeal and the limitations of the gallery as an alternative to the

> 1 Ian White, "Kinomuseum" in Mike Sperlinger and Ian White (ed), Kinomuseum: Towards an Artists' Cinema, (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2008) p. 13.

2 White, p. 14.

3 This program, curated and presented by Mary Kelly (on May 5, 2007) was called "Fallout" and consisted of Disaster by Sherry Milner & Ernie Larson (1976), Fast Trip, Long Drop by Gregg Bordowitz (1993) and not a matter of if but when (Julia Meltzer, David Thorne) (2006).

4 White, p. 26.



Phil Collins, Auto-Kino! (2010), Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin 2010, installation view, photograph by Jens Ziehe. Filmstill taken from: Christoph Doering, 3302 - Taxi Film (1979). Courtesy Paper Art Visual and Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin 2010. © Phil Collins, Kunsthalle Berlin 2010.

movie theater. Informed by the positions developed in these two texts, I examine disparate practices and models of spectatorship developed within art and film cultures.

In a recent contribution to Millennium Film Journal, Laura Marks examines differences between the gallery and theater as viewing environments for single channel works, identifying a tension between critical positions that espouse either spatiality (framed as social, even if distracted) or temporality (aligned with immersion, and an engagement with duration). She suggests that while theatrical exhibition creates the conditions for immersive viewing, gallery installation tends to elicit a more "cognitive" response, because gallery-goers engage only with the idea of duration. Instead of viewing the work in its entirety, she suggests that gallery visitors often stay with a work "just long enough to get an idea of it," giving rise to a form of "cognitive consumerism." To illustrate this point, Marks cites a comment made by Chrissies Iles in relation to Documenta 11 (2002), an exhibition that included a substantial film program as well as an extensive array of (often lengthy) moving image installations. Iles states:

No one knew Jonas Mekas was in Documenta because his work was only in the film program. But the art world was discovering people like Ulrike Ottinger because she had an eight-hour film in the gallery. The fact that people only saw ten minutes or half an hour of it was offset by the fact that many more thousands of people now know that she exists.7

Marks, however, questions the value of this mode of spectatorship. She suggests that it is premised upon a "fiction of virtual time"8 particular to the information age, in which the full viewing of film and video works encountered in the gallery is constantly postponed to a later moment. She ends her discussion of Documenta 11 with an image of "insomniac artgoers finally getting around to seeing the movie on YouTube because they can't sleep [...] watching Ulrike Ottinger in their pajamas at 3 in the morning."

Hito Steverl, theorizing the museum as a kind of "factory" organized around the work of cultural consumption, also develops her argument through reference to the inclusion of lengthy film and video works in Documenta 11. Although Steverl is also responding to the fact that certain forms of filmmaking have been pushed away from the theater and toward the gallery, her principal aim is to theorize the labor of moving image consumption. Describing the art museum generally as the site of a crowd that is "dispersed in time and space [...] immersed and atomized,"9 she frames it as the successor to the factory and as an emblematic site of the post-Fordist economy of consumption. In her analysis, Documenta 11 is significant primarily because its form and reception actually underscored the impossibility of a particular mode of spectatorship, which is premised upon the notion of "the spectator-as-sovereign." 10 Steyerl coins this term to describe a spectator who is motivated by the need to "master the show [...] to pronounce a verdict, and to assign value"11 and categorizes this desire for mastery as an "attempt to assume the compromised sovereignty of the traditional bourgeois subject." She argues that the presence of cinema (or works of cinematic duration) in exhibitions such as *Documenta 11* makes the adoption of this idealized vantage point impossible, underscoring the museum's limitations as a public sphere. Steyerl's analysis also suggests that while the museum can no longer claim to operate as a site for the exercise of judgment and attribution of value, it nonetheless retains an important symbolic function. This is because exhibitions such as *Documenta 11* have the capacity to "conserve the absence of the public sphere" and display, through this absence, "the *desire* for something to be realized in its place." 13

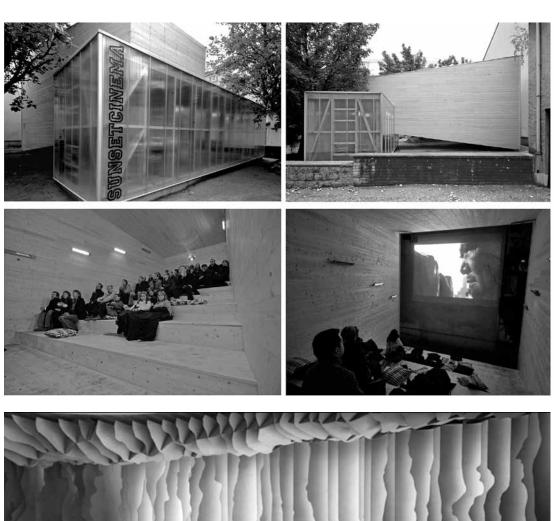
Steyerl's analysis of the museum as factory is not a defense of moving image installation, and it is clearly not premised upon the "Marxist and psychoanalytic critique of suture," which Marks identifies as prevalent in theories of installation.¹⁴ In fact Steyerl's discussion of labor actually resonates to some extent with Marks's critique of cognitive consumerism, not least because of the fact that it too incorporates an invented scenario of moving image consumption. Instead of a scene of late-night YouTube viewing, however, Steyerl imagines a situation which all of the night guards and visitors at Documenta 11 might somehow have worked together in order to view, discuss and make sense of the exhibition in its entirety. This is not a situation of imagined co-presence in time and space, in which the guards and spectators are envisaged as an enormous group moving through the exhibition, crowding into the cinema to view the screening programs together, and subsequently gathering for a discussion. Rather, Steyerl describes a scenario in which the labor of viewing is shared only in the sense of being divided. The labor of this (fictional) audience is also organized in a manner that owes little to the traditional worker's movement. This is because the 'multitude' that figures in Steyerl's account is not a new social class imbued with the power to challenge the supranational economic and political order that has replaced sovereign nation states (the model proposed in Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri's Empire). Instead, Steverl draws upon Paul Virno's more ambivalent vision of the multitude as a force that has no class-consciousness - since it is not a class - but is rather defined by its potential to produce itself.15

As already noted, Marks develops a critique of cognitive consumption, tacitly alluding to an economy in which the "idea" of the work is more valuable, and perhaps exchangeable, than the work itself. Interestingly, however, she does not consider how such "ideas" might acquire value, by considering the discursive specificities of cinema and museum cultures. Perhaps because she frames sociality as integral to the (human) body, noting that "the body, memory and perception are already social," ¹⁶ Marks is also dismissive of some attempts to materialize the social

in moving image installation, suggesting that these works assume an "idiotic spectator who isn't able to remember that other people and a society exist unless she is forcibly reminded that the image is constructed in space — by tripping over a bench in the dark, for example." Some "reminders" of the social in contemporary art, however, go well beyond the placement of a bench in an installation. In fact I would argue that the social is sometimes signified by artists precisely through conceptual or literal reference to the movie theater.

Elsewhere, I have theorized a fascination with self-consciously cinematic sociality contemporary art, through reference to a number of public art projects that take the form of temporary cinemas, such as Jesse Jones's 12 Angry Films in Dublin (2006), Tobias Putrih's Venetian, Atmospheric in Venice (2007) and Phil Collins's Auto-Kino! in Berlin (2010). Significantly, these artists do not

- **5** Laura Marks, "Immersed in the Single Channel: Experimental Media From Theater to Gallery," *Millennium Film Journal* **55** (2012) p. 21.
- 6 Marks, p. 14.
- 7 Chrissie Iles, cited by Marks, p. 21.
- 8 Marks, p. 21. Italics in original.
- **9** Hito Steyerl, "Is a Museum a Factory," e-flux Journal 7, (2009): 5. [Accessed June 1, 2013] http://www.e-flux.com/journal/is-a-museum-a-factory/.
- 10 Steyerl, p. 8.
- 11 Steyerl, p. 8.
- 12 Steyerl does not specify when this "traditional" bourgeois subject was formed, but she is clearly interested in the persistence and decline of the bourgeois public sphere in contemporary society, citing as a reference Thomas Elsaesser's paper "The Cinema in the Museum: Our Last Bourgeois Public Sphere," presented at the International Film Studies conference, "Perspectives on the Public Sphere: Cinematic Configurations of "I" and "We"," Berlin, April 23-25, 2009.
- 13 Steyerl, p. 8. [Emphasis in original].
- 14 Marks, p. 20.
- 15 For a discussion of Virno's position in relation to that of Hardt and Negri, see Sylvère Lotringer, "Foreword: We, the multitude," in Paolo Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, (New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 7-21.
- 16 Marks, p. 20.
- 17 Marks, p. 20.
- 18 See Maeve Connolly, 'Temporality, Sociality, Publicness: Cinema as Art Project', *Afterall* 29 (2012), pp. 4-15.





TOP Apolonija Šušteršič and Bik Van der Pol, *Sunset Cinema* (2007). Courtesy the artists. **BOTTOM Tobias Putrih**, *Venetian Atmospheric* (2007). Courtesy the artist and Beam Contemporary Art, New York, London.

appropriate the form of the contemporary commercial multiplex, instead making reference to older forms of theatrical exhibition, such as the drive-in (Jones and Collins) or to the ornate 'atmospheric cinemas' designed by John Eberson¹⁹ in the 1920s and 30s (Putrih). These projects also develop a far more complex engagement with cinematic spatiality and sociality than that suggested in Marks's account of installation, since Collins, Jones and Putrih draw upon histories of film exhibition to explore the role of cinema in the imagining of the social body. My research also encompasses public art projects in which artists collaborated with local film clubs or festival organizations on the realization or programming of cinema structures.²⁰ For example, Sunset Cinema (2007) by Apolonija Šušterši and Bik Van der Pol was a temporary cinema constructed in a public square in Luxembourg, programmed by the artists and also by several local film clubs, while Sun Cinema (2010) by Clemens von Wedemeyer is a permanent structure on the outskirts of the city of Mardin in Turkey, devised partly for use by the organizers of a local film festival.

How do these temporary movie theaters and collaborations between artists and film programmers relate to the theories and practices of spectatorship discussed by Marks and Steyerl? From one perspective, the emergence of the temporary cinema as a public art form might seem to signal an embrace of theatrical immersion and cinematic duration on the part of artists, curators and art institutions. At the same time, however, artists such as Jones, Apolonija Šušterši and Bik Van der Pol (and to a lesser extent, Collins, Putrih and von Wedemeyer) are clearly drawn toward cinema in part because they are interested in the desire, highlighted by Steyerl, for something that might take the place of the public sphere.21 So cinema occupies a strongly symbolic function within these works, perhaps even operating as "idea" rather than "experience" in the sense advocated by Marks. In my view, however, these disparate understandings of cinema (as idea and experience) are not opposed, but rather intertwined, as evidenced by a brief glance at the exhibition practices of organizations such as Millennium Film Workshop and Anthology Film Archives.

INDEPENDENT THINKING AND SHARED VIEWING

The 20th anniversary edition of *Millennium Film Journal* (published in 1986) includes a number of illuminating interviews with several figures integral to the founding and history of the Millennium Film Workshop, including Howard Guttenplan, Flo Jacobs and Ken Jacobs. Reflecting upon the initial aims of the organization, Guttenplan notes that "the idea was to create a communal cooperative atmosphere, where everybody would contribute."²² He also suggests that while screenings,

which generally favored new work, often incorporated discussion, audiences were often "less vocal" in their criticisms than might be typical in European avant-garde film contexts.²³ In the same anniversary issue, however, Flo Jacobs strongly emphasizes the value of "confrontational" modes of post-screening discussion, describing the screening as "a scientific testing ground" to support "film thinking," rather than to promote career advancement.24 Describing the workshop as "a little space of socialism,"25 Ken Jacobs frames the practice of independent filmmaking in overtly political terms, stating: "I had thought this independent thing was a kind of democratic urge, that idiosyncratic cinema would break Hollywood's mind control."26 He also argues that the culture of "independent thinking" operated in tension with promotional discourses around some films, which attracted audiences who were less likely to engage in critique. So it seems that, for Ken and Flo Jacobs at least, the Millennium theater was valuable because it could function (at least ideally) as a space in which autonomous critical positions could be established and publicly articulated. Although anticonsensual and determinedly oppositional with regard to commercial cinema, this model of reception also seems to resonate with Steyerl's account of the "sovereign" spectator of the bourgeois public sphere, who seeks to "pronounce a verdict, and to assign value."27

19 See also Giuliana Bruno, Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film (New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 48-49.

20 Connolly, pp. 13-15.

21 My discussion of the public sphere is also informed by Simon Sheikh's research. See Simon Sheikh, 'In the Place of the Public Sphere? Or, the World in Fragments', Republicart.net June 2004, [Accessed June 2013] http://republicart.net/disc/publicum/sheikh03_en.htm.

22 Howard Guttenplan, in Scott MacDonald, "The Millennium after Twenty Years: An Interview with Howard Guttenplan," *Millennium Film Journal* 16/17/18 (1986): p. 11.

23 Guttenplan, p. 15.

24 Flo Jacobs, in Lindley Hanlon and Tony Pipolo, "Interview with Ken and Flo Jacobs," *Millennium Film Journal* 16/17/18 (1986): pp. 31-32.

25 Ken Jacobs, in Hanlon and Pipolo, p. 32.

26 Ibid., p. 49.

27 Steyerl, p. 8.

A somewhat different model of reception informed the design and realization of the Invisible Cinema, as evidenced by the oral histories and published accounts gathered by Sky Sitney²⁸, yet it is still possible to identify an emphasis on cinema as ideal. Designed by Peter Kubelka, constructed by Giorgio Cavaglieri and funded by the art patron Jerome Hill, the Invisible Cinema operated from 1970 to 1974, at Anthology Film Archives, then located at Joseph Papp's Public Theater on Lafayette Street in New York City. Sitney demonstrates that this theater was intended to offer the ideal conditions for the viewing of experimental work, by eliminating distractions such as light spillage and the sounds of cinema-goers. Audience members were physically separated from each other and seated in small individual booths, which were fitted with an overhanging "shell-like"29 structure in order to reduce noise, ostensibly enabling greater concentration on the film. In some respects, the Invisible Cinema functioned as the logical extension of a modernist ideology espoused by Kubelka, who specifically sought to differentiate the film auditorium from the theater. Yet it was not actually intended to isolate audience members from each other. Instead, as Sitney's research indicates, Kubelka was motivated by the desire to create an ideal community:

You knew that there were many people in the room, you could feel their presence, and you would also hear them a bit, but in a very subdued way, so they would not disturb your contact with the film. A sympathetic community was created, a community in which people liked each other. In the average cinema where the heads of other people are in the screen, where I hear them crunching their popcorn, where the latecomers force themselves through the rows and where I have to hear their talk which takes me out of the cinematic reality which I have come to participate in, I start to dislike the others. Architecture has to provide a structure in which one is in a community that is not disturbing to others.³⁰

Recalling Steyerl's imaginary scenario of collective moving image consumption, the Invisible Cinema was also designed to enable an experience of viewing that was both shared and divided. But while Steyerl describes a situation in which the labor time of the audience is divided across the installations and screenings of *Documenta 11*, the Invisible Cinema physically divided the space of the auditorium to enable a communal experience of time.

CRITICAL FORUMS AND LIVING ARCHIVES

In the decades that have passed since the Invisible Cinema's closure, many of the organizations established to support the distribution and exhibition of experimental film and video have changed significantly, but structures for the shared viewing and discussion of moving image works remain important in art and film cultures. The Londonbased arts agency LUX, founded in 2002, absorbed many of the activities of the moving image-focused organizations that preceded it, such as The London Filmmakers Cooperative, London Video Arts and The Lux Centre. In addition to commissioning and distributing moving image works, LUX provides professional development and research resources for artists, and since 2011 has supported the establishment of three Critical Forums, located in the UK (Glasgow and London) and also in Ireland (Dublin). These Forums are monthly discussion groups for artists working with the moving image to talk about their ideas and practices in a "mutually supportive environment."31 Benjamin Cook, director of LUX, describes the Critical Forum initiative as "our contemporary interpretation of our own historical roots as an artists' co-operative and the original ideas of the coop as an artist-centered convergent space for making-showing-discussion."32 Framing it as a response to artists seeking "a space for critical discussion outside of the academic environment," Cook emphasizes that the group structure is peer-based and non-hierarchical, offering a counterpoint to the "academic models that people are programmed into" in art school.

The membership of each Critical Forum is assembled through an open call, but limited to those who can make a commitment to participate for six months, and who are no longer in education. Group meetings take place in private; LUX staff attend the first session and subsequently only participate by invitation. In the case of the Dublin-based Critical Forum (established in 2012), discussion generally focuses on material that is not produced by group members, and sessions are generally structured around discussion rather than viewing.³³ While screenings might form part of a meeting, more often members view works in advance, sometimes watching them online. Since the participants do not engage with each other as an audience, they do not possess the potential agency highlighted by Ian White. Nor could they be conceived as a "sympathetic

- **28** Sky Sitney, "The Search for the Invisible Cinema," Grey Room 19 (2005), pp. 102-113.
- 29 Peter Kubelka, in Sitney, p. 107.
- 30 Kubelka, in Sitney, p. 111.
- **31** For more information see the LUX website (accessed June 2013) http://lux.org.uk/education/lux-critical-forum.
- **32** Benjamin Cook, email correspondence, April 15, 2013.
- **33** Jenny Brady (member of the Dublin-based Critical Forum), email correspondence, May 6, 2013.



The Invisible Cinema designed by Peter Kubelka (1970). Courtesy Anthology Film Archives.



lan White, *Trauerspiel 1* (2012), performance still, photograph by Nina Hoffman. Courtesy Maeve Connolly.

community" in the sense suggested by Kubelka's account of the Invisible Cinema. But perhaps by consciously rejecting the academic model of critique these groups are signaling a resistance to the cognitive economy of contemporary art lamented by Marks, within which works are often reduced to "ideas."

My final example is a work realized within the context of an ambitious and expansive project, Living Archive — Archive Work as a Contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice, initiated in 2011 by Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin. Thirty curators, filmmakers, artists and researchers were invited to develop projects in relation to the archive holdings of the Arsenal film and video collection, which has been in existence since 1963. Regular meetings, public screenings, discussions, performances and other events were organized over a period of two years at various Berlin venues, culminating in several weeks of intensive programming activity at Arsenal and at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in June 2013. Rather than attempting to engage with the Living Archive project as a whole, I want to discuss a single element; Trauerspiel 1 by Ian White, presented on March 13, 2012 in HAU 1 of the Hebbel am Ufer Theater. This work incorporated screenings of five films selected from the Arsenal collection, and the screenings were interspersed with five 'dances,' performed on stage by White, utilizing a variety of costumes, props, punctuated by the opening and closing of curtains. Another male performer remained seated on the stage throughout, naked and silent but for the amplified clicking sounds emanating from a pair of knitting needles that he held, used in the steady production of what appeared to be a red woolen scarf.

Trauerspiel 1 engaged with ideas drawn from Walter Benjamin's book The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels), which theorizes the German late Baroque dramatic form of the Trauerspiel, or 'mourning play' as distinct from the Aristotelian tragedy. Summarizing aspects of Benjamin's complex argument, White notes that while the tribulations of the Aristotelian Tragic Hero give rise, for the audience, to "a catharsis that reinscribes civic obedience," the mourning play is characterized by a more allegorical model. In this latter mode, time passes "more regularly (albeit in an abstract space)" and "meaning is demonstration-like, a staged act of speaking and reading rather than the effect of emotional peaks and troughs, mimesis, persuasion or expression as such."34 In Trauerspiel 1, certain formal qualities of the mourning play, which is brought to life in Benjamin's book through a mosaic of quotations, were suggested by the demonstration-like qualities of the movements and actions performed on stage.

Within the context of my discussion of shared viewing, however, White's project is perhaps most interesting because it turned HAU 1 of the Hebbel am Ufer theater into a "kind of cinema" that was also a "kind of museum" where cinematic duration was preserved. Rather than choreographing the movement of an audience through the physical spaces of this particular "cinema," White instead deployed the formal, architectural and institutional resources of the theater (such as the performing body, props, lighting, dramaturgy, and the architecture of stage and auditorium) to engage the seated audience in an exploration of actual and imagined spatio-temporal boundaries between auditorium, stage and screen. Instead of staging a dissolution of boundaries, Trauerspiel 1 instead structured a more deliberate movement across these physical and conceptual divisions. Consequently, through its transformation of a theater into a cinema-museum, White's project offered yet another way of conceptualizing moving image consumption as an activity that involves, necessarily and sometimes productively, both the sharing and division of space and time.

> 34 Ian White, Trauerspiel 1, program notes, March 13, 2012.

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TOWARD A SOCIAL CINEMA REVISITED

ERICA LEVIN

In 1930, Jean Vigo stood before a ciné-club audience at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier in Paris to introduce his first film, À Propos de Nice, a silent short made in collaboration with the Russian cinematographer (and younger brother of Dziga Vertov) Boris Kaufman. The film begins with a spectacular explosion of fireworks. The aerial views that follow promise a totalized image of life on the ground below. Other great city symphonies of the interwar period offer machinic visions of social synchronization, À Propos de Nice instead fixes on moments of incommensurability and stark social disparity. Kaufman shot much of the film's footage with a hidden Kinamo camera, his kino-eye attuned to the strange energies stirred up by the arrival of carnival season in Nice. Palm trees spin; enormous papier-mâché masks come to life. Tourists strolling the famous Promenade des Anglais evoke visions of exotic animals on the loose. These wealthy leisure-seeking visitors enjoy games of chance and sport that remain a world away from the rhythms of labor and play that pervade the garbage-strewn streets of the old city. The advent of carnival upsets the clear division between the bourgeoisie and the city's immigrant underclass, but only temporarily.



"To aim at a social cinema would be to consent to work a mine of subjects continuously replenished by reality," Vigo told his audience. It would be to "stimulate echoes" other than those of the belches of the "ladies and gentleman who come to the cinema to help their digestion." This would require putting an end to tired narrative formulas, as he put it, "two pairs of lips, which take 3,000 meters to come together and almost as long to come unstuck." Vigo's vitriol was aimed as much at the conventions of the commercial cinema as it was at the avant-garde. He was skeptical of the "overly artistic subtlety of a pure cinema"; the navel gazing of "technique for technique's sake" did not, in his view, point the way forward.1 His address, translated and published as "Toward a Social Cinema" in the inaugural issue of this journal, is subtly suggestive despite all the bombast. Wary of "strangling" his vision with a formula, Vigo insists only that what the camera records "must be considered a document" and "treated as a document during the editing." When he does offer specific directives, they are sometimes contradictory, as though he were still working out the implications of his own efforts in À Propos de Nice.

For example, he declares, "Conscious posing or acting cannot be tolerated." In practice however, he was much less orthodox.

À Propos de Nice is a film punctuated with droll set pieces and live-action animations. Many of Vigo's trick edits revolve around scenes of fleshy exposure: A shoeshine suddenly leaves a foot absurdly bare; a sunbather wakes to find his skin completely blackened by the sun; a woman flashes through a series of costume changes without changing her pose, ending up entirely nude in the last shot. With these manipulations, Vigo brings the bodily dimensions of social experience to the fore, juxtaposing the rituals of the leisure class with scenes of everyday life among the less privileged: Sunbathing, promenading, formal dancing — all are rendered with biting humor.

Jean Vigo, À Propos de Nice (1930), frame enlargements.

¹ Jean Vigo, "Toward a Social Cinema" trans. Stuart Liebman, *Millennium Film Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Winter 1977-78): pp. 21-24.





Jean Vigo, À Propos de Nice (1930), frame enlargements.

Quick edits emphasize and isolate socially resonant postures and movements. Vivid cine-portraits of wealthy tourists are interrupted by scenes shot at the zoo: Ladies in furs prance along the promenade like ostriches, while sun worshipers bask like crocodiles at the water's edge. Social cinema for Vigo is a cinema of revelation, a way of showing "the hidden reason behind a gesture," or "the interior beauty of a caricature from an ordinary person, chosen at random."

Another surprising aspect of Vigo's statement is the long description it offers of Luis Buñuel's Un Chien Andalou, a surrealist fever-dream that would seem to share little in common with À Propos de Nice. Looking past the obvious disparities, Vigo grasped "social implications" of Buñuel's attack on bourgeois pieties. In Un Chien Andalou he found confirmation of his own desire to deliver a "kick in the pants to macabre ceremonies." Rather than dryly dissect the activities of the leisure class, À Propos de Nice delights obscenely in all their grotesquery. Carnival revelers dance, their short skirts and high leg kicks filmed from below (a bawdy reversal of the distanced aerial shots that introduce the film). The frenzied celebration takes off

in the form of a procession: a march of oversized masks gives way to the exuberant, libidinally charged exchange of flowers tossed and trampled along the parade route. Vigo juxtaposes this footage with scenes that disclose the otherwise invisible labor of the working-class women whose job it was harvest the flowers. Later, this dialectical montage shifts into a more symbolic register. Ominous shots of waiting warships and a funeral procession disrupt the progress of the festivities. Time bends as the dancers' movements become slow and dreamlike; increasingly, the film cuts away from the celebration to scenes of ostentatious graveyard statuary. À Propos de Nice not only documents social divisions, it stokes the unruly energies carnival would otherwise dispel. Vigo finds a deathly stasis lurking just below the city's flirtation with social disorder. His film builds toward the eruption of revolutionary desire, which in the final shot takes the form of an unmistakably phallic industrial smokestack.

Vigo modestly presented À Propos de Nice as "only a simple rough draft" of a social cinema still to come. This promise would be deferred indefinitely by its author's untimely death in 1934, leaving it up to later generations

to consider the legacy of the cinema he proposed. Vigo's work is most often situated within the history of French cinema, or within a broader history of political filmmaking. Today, the widespread popularity of online video-sharing platforms like Youtube and Vimeo would seem to announce the return of "social cinema" under a new guise, begging the question of its history (and future) now that the means of making and distributing moving images online have become much more accessible. To pose the problem simply: How does the promise of social cinema read today? Given the explosion of new forms of social media, what new possibilities might social cinema now allow, or perhaps better, demand?

"Hey um Youtube...It's PinkSummerCrush, I wanted to start a webshow and I need ideas for it, but I don't know...like...any ideas." So begins a recent work by Elisa Giardina Papa with the screaming title, need ideas!?!PLZ!! (2011). For five and a half minutes, viewers are entreated to help would-be pre-adolescent content providers figure out what content to provide. "Idea" here becomes an elusive concept: what would be a viable idea in the world of PinkSummerCrush and her anonymous audience? Content is simply something to do; something modest offered up freely in exchange for a sense of accomplishment or relief. As one user puts it, "I don't know what to do... so give me ideas. I'm trying to get more stuff done." Another whines, "I really need new vids, I have no time, ok?" These pleas are funny and sad and strange. They register a palpable confusion of work and play, social anxiety expressed as a preoccupation with stats and productivity. Giardina Papa gathers her clips from the vast dump of media recorded and uploaded online as casually as teenagers once picked up the phone without much of anything to say. (Many greet their viewers familiarly with some version of "hey guys.") They seem surprisingly (alarmingly) willing to honor any request, one caveat — "anything except stick something up my nose." Their candor is affecting, charming even, despite the discomforting feeling of having stumbled upon a pervert's trove of pre-pubescent innocence at risk.

In À Propos de Nice the games children play in the street catches the eye of the camera. Kaufman shoots a game of morra (a counting game similar to rock-paperscissors) in a tight close up. A shared code of hand signals and counting gestures is all that is required to generate an intensity of concentration powerful enough to cause the world outside the boy's circle to retreat entirely from view. By contrast, Giardina Papa's video charts the psychogeography of suburban distraction. It tells us everything we need to know about the boredom and isolation that goes on behind closed bedroom doors. The Internet solicits a fixated, but always only half attentive mode of scanning. We watch these tweens watching themselves, their faces intermittently illuminated by the cool light of the monitor. The webcam becomes a way to register one's own existence, measured as an index of one's willingness to participate, to perform. It also records a battery of nervous, funny, weird gestures and bodily affects exploited to great effect by Giardina Papa's subtle editing. Adolescent preoccupation with quantifiable status, with having some way to see and measure oneself vis-à-vis an abstract conception of others, has become a generalized state of affairs, the dominant logic of neoliberal society. These kids, we understand immediately — they are us only more sympathetic for earnestly struggling with the transformation of social life into an economy based on attention, its value set by its increasing scarcity.

There is no unseen site of exploitation underlying these mini-dramas of self-subjection that could be revealed, as Vigo does, with parallel montage. Instead, cuts are a way to collect samples, underline patterns, isolate gestures and ticks — in one sequence, a series of girls point insistently to the imaginary comment box just outside the frame. The intimacy of video's direct address prevents these kids from becoming mere caricatures or sociological abstractions; each clip remains a compelling portrait. need ideas!?!PLZ!! is a catalog of moments that betray anxiety about the implicit social contract of the media format, anxiety the video allows us to feel as much as see and understand conceptually. As signs of manic acquiescence to the limits of the interface accumulate, they betray a powerful shared desire to destroy the order social media formats govern.

Though it pervades much of daily life, particularly within the American suburban terrain charted by Giardina Papa, social media is still relatively new, not much older than the kids who populate her video. Omer Fast's CNN Concatenated (2002) explores television's role in shaping visibility (or invisibility) of the social body on screen before a billion personal news feeds on Facebook took over. Fast recorded hours of CNN broadcasts in the weeks and months after the attacks of September 11th and then painstakingly parsed this footage into short segments to create a database of ten thousand single spoken words and phrases. Familiar newscasters deliver a disconcerting address, spoken as if channeling a voice from elsewhere. Each talking head appears intermittently in a brief flash; spoken words are stitched together like the letters of a ransom note. Vigo's crosscutting in À Propos de Nice maps urban space to make economic and social disparities readily visible, while Giardina Papa's sampling in need ideas!?!PLZ!! shows us the casual self-exploitation of a carefully selected online demographic. Fast uses editing to different ends: he cuts with little interest in setting up contrasts or grouping like with like - concatenation here is an operation of massification.

In *CNN Concatenated* we witness the last gasps of media's mass address. It begins as an incantation or a curious poem written in the idiom of advertising copy:

Between/eastern/daylight/savings/and/our/west coast/viewers
This just in/and/coming soon
Between/commercial breaks/and/breaking stories
Between/the Gallup polls/and/eye witness/
testimonies
Between/town hall meetings/chat rooms/websites/
surveys/figures/numbers
expert analysis/statistics/and/their/partisan/
priorities
Between/the Middle East/and/Far/West
Between/the Midwest/and/the Far East
Between/the coasts/and/the swing states...

A series of virtual, geographic, and political sites (chat rooms, the Midwest, swing states) are linked together one word at a time, suggesting a cable news network boasting of its far-reaching coverage. Repetition of the word "between" spoken by different newscasters emphasizes the process of concatenation — the linking up of one speaker to another.

Between/what/used/to be/between/us/and/what/ may/have/only/been/a border Between/the sheets/between/each bite/between/ desire/and/confusion

"Between" marks a space of intimacy, no longer simply a physical or abstract interval, but also a state of being or coming undone. Here the social is not mapped in the contrasts between already recognizable and clearly defined social classes or spaces. It appears only in the form of an unrepresentable negativity, everywhere and nowhere at once. Tension builds as the narration slides into an erratic one-sided rant directed at an intimate partner who may or may not be present in the flesh.

You/are/so/hypocritical/self/absorbed/and/ pathetic/that/I/wonder/sometimes/just/how/ much/it/takes/to/move/you.

Fast exaggerates to the extreme a pervasive anxiety about an absent or inattentive audience that Anne M. Wagner has identified as the most significant feature of many early works of video art, but which persists, for example, in more recent works like *need ideas!!!PLZ!!.*² Comically, absurdly, but also viciously, Fast goes after his wayward viewers, excoriating the audience for its passivity, weakness of character, and disavowed dependence on cable news, especially in moments of crisis.

Concatenation creates a figure that conjures the unrepresentability of the mass in negative form — an invisible force powerful enough to coordinate the chorus of talking heads into a singular expression of venom. In Fast's drama, CNN plays the role of the scorned intimate, an unhappy and unfulfilled partner. The work could be a rejoinder to Jean Baudrillard, who argues that the masses have long been misrecognized as the dupe of power, when in fact they wield their passivity as a form of strength "superior to any power acting upon them." They are not a reserve of "potential energy," their force, he insists, "is actual, in the present, and sufficient unto itself." It takes the form of silence, a withdrawal, which in CNN Concatenated is made palpably infuriating. In Fast's work however, the power of the silent majority is less impeachable than Baudrillard makes it out to be. Ultimately, it becomes difficult to distinguish the newscasters' tirade from a paranoid, self-punishing interior monologue.

In Natalie Bookchin's recent work, Now he's out in public and everyone can see (2012), like Giardina Papa's video, made from material found on YouTube, we encounter a world in which CNN's hegemony has been eclipsed by the rule of TMZ and Twitter. Here the cultural logic of social media transforms the silent majority into a chattering crowd. Like Fast, Bookchin uses recombinatory editing of appropriated material, but rather than hijacking the recognizable representatives of the commercial media to perform a script written by the artist, she mines anonymous online archives to excavate the ready-athand scripts that people reproduce themselves. Now he's out in public and everyone can see takes the form of an 18-channel installation. Faces appear and disappear on screens floating throughout a dark room. Without naming any specific celebrity, politician, or public personality, isolated individuals speak directly to the viewer. They reflect on the consequences of actions taken by someone whose identity seems difficult to pin down, an ambiguity bound up with markers of social significance — class, gender, and especially race. Sometimes a single voice speaks a line that is almost seamlessly picked up by someone else. "I don't know what race you are.../...Even his name is a mystery." At other times an entire host of speakers appear simultaneously, underlining a single word ("facts," "racist," "human" etc.) that functions as the hinge between each of their monologues. Details that seem to belong to the narrative of one familiar media figure, judged for his adultery for example, slide into discussions that allude to a contested birth certificate or plastic surgery, suddenly recalling the tabloid narratives of other prominent and highly scrutinized public figures. Bookchin doesn't manufacture these slippages as Fast does in CNN Concatenated, rather she imports them as found social documents.

Bookchin's orchestration exploits moments of synchronicity and dissonance. This style of editing is closer



Natalie Bookchin, Now he's out in public and everyone can see (2012), installation view. Courtesy the artist.

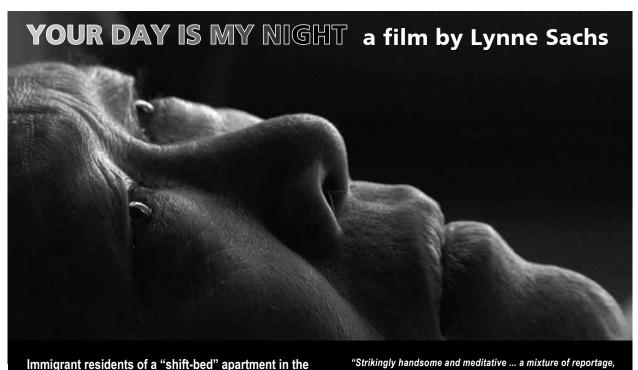
to conducting than concatenation. There's a powerful musical quality to the work, particularly when voices ring out in unison. Bookchin transforms these individual speakers into a Greek chorus for our own age of celebrity and political scandal, a precarious collective, whose members often use the same words to express very different sentiments. Her installation creates an echo chamber full of reverb and crossed signals. The danger of social media is that it allows us to share what we have to say with those who are already most likely to agree. Bookchin's work upsets boundaries between people who might not otherwise tune into each other's channels. What they share in common is the act of passing judgment on the public figures they discuss and dissect. Viewers are invited to respond in kind by finding ways to classify and situate each speaker within a larger social matrix: this one a tea partier, that one a Tiger Woods apologist or perhaps a Michael Jackson super-fan. By transforming these found documents into a series of linked portraits, Bookchin takes up the functions of social media, the tools it offers (linking, hashtags, indexing) to reimagine the idea of the social graph. But this is no utopian vision of the people's media, rather it reminds us that the social is a category largely based on the policing of difference and maintaining order. The work plays with the unconscious slippages that reveal the seams of that order, but stops short of shifting into the kind of revolutionary high gear that comes at the conclusion of Vigo's film. Bookchin's work tells us something about the affective experiences generated by new forms of online protest, for example the testimonies about personal debt that spread during the Occupy uprisings or the statements of solidarity behind the "I am Trayvon Martin" campaign. These strategies exploit powerful forms of resonance and repetition immanent to a format that underlines isolation and individuality.

- 2 Anne M. Wager, "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence" October 91 (Winter 2000) pp. 59-80.
- 3 Jean Baudrillard, In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities (New York: Semiotext(e), 1978), pp. 6-7.

The work that feels most relevant to the ongoing continuation of Vigo's project today takes up a convention rarely used in the cinema, direct address. It belongs to a history of video used as a medium of self-reflection and interaction, a history that sits alongside the political cinemas that usually claim Vigo as an influence. Importantly, video is a medium bound up with television's formal codes and demographic modes of address. Television is an important bridge between the social understood as referring to the structures of social life — a signifier for a world of relations qualified by class, gender, race, ethnicity, etc., and social as description of modes of interaction, exchange, and communication. To speak of a social cinema today is to reckon with the slippage between these two meanings. These two registers of "social" are connected, but more and more, the meaning of the former is occluded by the later. Vigo proposed a cinema that would generate a provocative image of a social world characterized by division and inequality, a vision that would serve as a spur to political awakening and revolution. To piece together this picture, he set about recording people engaged in everyday forms of labor and leisure. His style of montage was primarily dialectical, if sometimes executed anarchically: each shot taken as a document — a social truth, and treated like a document in the editing. Today filmmakers and artists are as likely to work found documents drawn from television or uncovered online, as they are to shoot material

themselves. Leisure and labor are still the categories of everyday life that have the most to tell us about our social world, even more so as clear distinction between the two breaks down. I suspect this breakdown has something to do with the shift away from dialectical editing toward forms that mimic the functionality of databases and search engines. Despite these differences, it is possible to find traces in contemporary work of some of Vigo's most significant innovations, particularly his attention to the bodily dimensions of social life, especially as it appears in the terrain between portraiture and caricature. Social cinema today (broadly understood to incorporate artist's video and installation) cannot do without individuals if it wants to show us something about the conditions of social visibility, and by extension, the shape of social life in our own moment. How individuals come to be constituted as individuals, how they forge connections, what those connections mean — what they are, but also what they could be — these are the questions that keep us moving toward a social cinema today.

Erica Levin is pursuing a Ph.D. in Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation looks at a phenomenon described by Stan VanDerBeek in 1974 as "the emergence of a new social media consciousness."



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TIPPING POINT.



PEGGY GALE

We are well past the moment for acknowledging the change: digital forms have long trumped celluloid and videotape, and time-based projections and installation works are mature and familiar forms. The Whitney Museum in New York mounted Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977 in 2001, and in 2002 Documenta 11, curated by Okwui Enwezor, was described as "a 600-hour Documenta" by critic Eleanor Hartney in Art in America, for its preoccupation with film and video installations. Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig (MUMOK) in Vienna presented X-Screen: Filmische Installationen und Aktionen der 60er und 70er Jahre, in 2005; then Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin (September 2006 - February 2007) looked at "expanded cinema" internationally from 1963 to 2005, initiated by artist Stan Douglas and curator Christopher Eamon. A similar point was reached for video in the early 1980s, with such major projects as The Luminous Image (1983) at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties (Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, 1983) or Video 84 mounted in Montreal (1984), all with substantial publications. Curator Dorine Mignot noted in her introduction to The Luminous Image that by 1983 the international video festivals being held at Montbéliard, Locarno, San Sebastian and The Hague were already well established, and television broadcasts of artists' video works were customary on Vidéographie (RTB Liège, Belgium) and Tape TV (VPRO, Netherlands). Notably, television was still considered a mass medium then, "the distributor of a one-sided stream of information" - in

radical contrast to today's fragmented 500+ channel universe with its specialty audiences, view-on-demand, access via satellite or cell-phone, and easy downloading to a personal computer.

In 2007, the ambitious exhibition Projections, curated by Barbara Fischer at the University of Toronto, articulated a history of Canadian works from 1964 to 2007, with slides, film and video as both means and subject. By that time the "white cube" of the museum had been thoroughly infiltrated by the "black box" of media-based installations — comfortable co-inhabitants — and Projections offered the first overview of such work from Canada. This essay seeks to identify a shift in favor of artists' incorporating time-based media in their works, focusing here on Canadian production and on the special place of performance in this history.

In a first generation, developing in the now-fabled 1960s, projected works using slides or small-format film appeared as extensions of painting or sculpture, influenced by a desire to engage with street life and by new rumblings from experimental theatre and Fluxus-based poetics.

In 1964 while he was living in New York and active as a painter and sculptor, Michael Snow constructed Little Walk for an ad hoc Expanded Cinema Festival organized by Jonas Mekas. Little Walk continued Snow's Walking

> **OPPOSITE John Massey, Black and White** (1987-1990), installation at the Power Plant, Toronto, 1987. Courtesy the artist.

Woman Works (1961–1967), and used Snow's Walking Woman stencil form — a white-painted, five-foot cut-out — as a screen for projecting an 8mm color film, 12:24 minutes long. When the piece was shown for a second time at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto) in 1994 Snow removed the original sound stripe for the film, and in 2005, transferred the piece to DVD for its new role as an installation at the Museum of Modern Art. Little Walk is classic "expanded cinema," a film pushed beyond the normal single screen, while it is also expanded painting and proto-performance, an engaging encounter in a gallery context.

With his film installation of 1974, Two Sides to Every Story, Snow takes such issues much further. The work uses two projectors and two 16mm color/sound films, projected synchronously on opposite sides of a suspended aluminum screen. The projectors take the position of the original cameras, seen visually centered on each screen with Snow seated to one side, while the ultra-thin whitepainted screen hanging in the gallery requires viewers to circle around it to assemble the "whole picture." Literal and apparent (figurative, metaphoric) realities unite. Two Sides to Every Story inhabits space and engages the room as a bounded sculpture. While further expanding a studio practice, the film has also abandoned the traditional theatre setting with fixed seating in a darkened hall; viewers now must be physically mobile and conceptually engaged in constructing meaning.

While elaborating an aesthetic of painting and sculpture, these works underscore *time* as a central element, and are examples of additional, related works appearing independently of each other in the same period, though each seems oblivious to being part of a perceived trend. Inconvenient to mount and maintain in a gallery or museum at that time, they are inventive and original, moving beyond the norms for two- and three-dimensional visual arts.

By the 1980s a more social and political consciousness becomes apparent, favoring sources in the natural, historical, and commercial world. They are less a product of the traditional artist's studio.

In earlier works, Stan Douglas had brought together photography, slides and accompanying audio tracks. These include *Breath* (1982, slide dissolve with soundtrack, 3 ½ min.)¹ and *Onomatopoeia* (1985-86) with slides, sound and player piano.²

For *Overture* (1986), his first looped film projection, Douglas opens up early cinema history: seven minutes of 16mm archival footage from the Edison Film Company which had been shot from the front of a train as it hurtles along tracks and through tunnels in a rocky mountain landscape.³ The images are accompanied by a disembodied male voice with sentences stitched together from Marcel

Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*; ⁴ the eye of the viewer "on the train" moves relentlessly forward through the landscape, caught through Proust's text between waking and dreaming. The gentle voice suspends us in a timeless "present," disoriented physically and psychologically, while the looping structure holds us in transition, always returning, always moving forward.

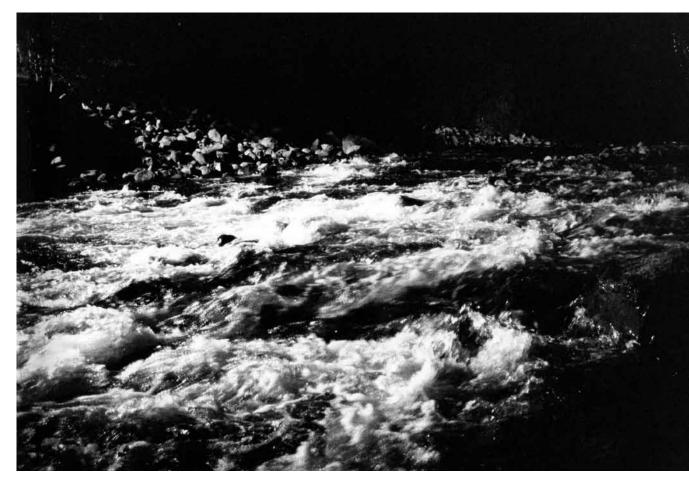
Overture introduces narrative issues to be played out in many later works, while foregrounding Douglas' penchant for historical research. The work was originally installed with the projector visibly present in the gallery space, while later installations reduce the mechanical element by enclosing the projector in a sound-proofed booth. The grainy grey image flickers alone on the gallery wall.

Just a year later, John Massey is viewer and participant in cinematic history, with his Black and White of 1987. Massey's voice quotes from Oliver Stone's just-released feature film Platoon, while a series of black and white slides of images from the film are projected on a summary plaster relief (of his own face) which appears behind a button-activated sliding door to a recessed wall opening. As the screen — a blank-slate surface — where the action unfolds, the artist becomes effectively one of the film's protagonists in the peep-show environment.

Vancouver-based Rodney Graham has ranged through a wide variety of film installation and performance works, all arising from his interest in the particulars and construction of the photographic image.

With *Two Generators* of 1984, his earliest cinemabased piece, Graham addresses issues related to Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story*, but now turned inside out. To record his film Graham set two power-generators in a wooded ravine, putting nature "on stage" with brilliant floodlights for its close-up moment. The subject matter, however, is neither the ravine nor the roaring sound of its lighting, but rather the conditions of subsequent *public viewing*. The completed film is presented in a classic cinema theatre with house lights that dim, the curtains opening to reveal the projected, illuminated ravine image, then closing again afterwards to repeat the cycle. The film is framed and given meaning by its theatrical projection, which takes over the work's central role.

No longer referencing the studio — painting and sculpture expanded by the introduction of time and performative elements — *Two Generators* focuses on the *reception* of time-based works and their place in the continuum of audiences and the viewing public. The viewer becomes aware of his or her physical position and a *duty* to understand the terms of the work and its construction of meaning. With its pre-determined playing time, it is a performance without performers, and the only



Rodney Graham, Two Generators (1984), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery.

sound or "event" on screen is the illumination of a ravine at night. The history of theatre-based cinema is invoked and insisted upon. It is not intended as a gallery installation for a passing audience.

In Graham's Halcion Sleep (1994) we have a profoundly interior private performance very different from the halting consciousness implied by Stan Douglas' voice-over text. Created for a modestly scaled projection or video screen, here Graham himself is the drugged sleeper in striped satin pajamas, rocking in the darkened back seat as he is driven home at night through rainy Vancouver.

In a further interior construction for cinema viewing, Coruscating Cinnamon Granules (1996) is shown in a room replicating Graham's own kitchen, albeit with rows of seating, as a playful response to advice for quick sale of a house through the attractive smell of freshly baked cookies. It is a hybrid performance of man and household device, Graham implicitly having strewed the titular cinnamon in advance on the heating stove element, which would create its galactic image.

- 1 Along with his series of black and white photographs, Breath was one of five slide-dissolve works by Douglas included in the important group exhibition, Vancouver Art and Artists 1931-1983, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983.
- 2 Onomatopoeia (1985-86) was shown first at the artist-run centre, The Western Front, Vancouver, 1986.
- 3 Scott Watson specifies the location as Kicking Horse Canyon and White Pass in British Columbia, Canada, from Edison Film Company, shot in 1899 and 1901. See Scott Watson, "Against the Habitual" in Stan Douglas, London: Phaidon Press, 1998, p. 44.





The following year Graham created Vexation Island, a nine-minute looped film shot in 35mm for ultra-wide screen and projected via laser disk in the Canadian Pavilion — now posited as a rustic beach-shack — at the Venice Biennale that year. Dressed in eighteenth-century shirt and hose, his hair tied back loosely with a ribbon, Robinson Crusoe-like, Graham lies unconscious on the shore. Waking at his parrot's cry to see a coconut lying nearby, he rises to shake the overhanging tree, only to be hit by another nut and once again lie prostrate by the lapping waves.

Unconscious again: a pleasing mode of mystery and promise, and welcome opportunity to relinquish conscious will.

Graham relishes dress-up and often takes on a character's performing role in his works, whether for photographs, for looped projection — or even (implicitly) through his early publications — musical scores and other printed works.⁵ Graham's filmed self-portraits in period garb include 35mm film loops transferred to DVD, including City Self, Country Self (2001) and the musicbased projections, How I Became a Ramblin' Man (1999, 9 min) with Graham as a guitar-playing cowboy, and A Reverie Interrupted by the Police (2003, 7:59 min) where he is a stripe-suited felon at the piano.⁶ There are others. Within these personal performances, narrative is implied by architecture, costume and décor to offer a cinematic setting and theatrical "otherness."

From the same period Graham's ongoing interest in the mechanics and history of cinema is evidenced by his incorporation within the installation itself, of massive, period 35mm projectors with looping apparatus, noisily proclaiming their presence and necessity for the viewing experience. Performing machines are foregrounded in these gallery/museum installations, as in Rheinmetall / Victoria-8 (2003, color, silent, 10:50 min) where "snow" gently falls on a majestic, vintage black typewriter, or the spinning, glittering chandelier of Torqued Chandelier Release (2004, color, silent, with purpose-built projection screen 305x183cm).

All of these are post-studio works in conception and realization. Cinema theatres are revisioned as gallery spaces, "the movies" as moving sculptures yet inhabitants of screens large and small, portable or iconic.

For Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller a different kind of performance is central; audio technology and impeccably created settings provide interactive, architectural sculpture with operatic dimensions.

With The Muriel Lake Incident (1999) the audience "is" inside a theatre with a film projected on a screen, though the architecture is model-sized and the viewer, standing to one side and looking in, hears a compelling, convincing audio track through binaural headphones.

This viewer, omniscient, is complicit with the characters on screen as well as with another, recorded "audience," heard quietly whispering into ears from behind or one side. For Paradise Institute (2001), the concept is expanded for an installation at the Canadian pavilion, 49th Venice Biennale, where an actual small cinema is created for seated viewers. The film has multiple sound sources fed into personal headphones: the soundtrack, with engaging, neighboring annoyances and dramatic events, is just out of sight within the surrounding auditorium. Architecture is a consistent framing device in their work, but the cinematic — whether factually visual or entirely cerebral and imagined — provides the true foundation of their dramatic sound installations.

> OPPOSITE Rodney Graham, TOP Vexation Island (1997), BOTTOM City Self/Country Self (2000). Frame enlargements. Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery.

- 4 The text elements are transcribed fully in Christine Ross, The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too. The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012, pp. 282-283.
- 5 These include Sigmund Freud's Die Gattung Cyclamen, a group of 24 identical dummy books by Rodney Graham, placed in Münster bookshops for the first Skulptur Projekte Münster, 1987, among Graham's many other Freud-related altered publications or book interventions. Another example is Parsifal. Transformation Music (Act 1). With E. Humperdinck's Supplement No. 90. The Latter Transcribed from the Original Manuscript and the Whole Typeset According to the Artist's Specifications, 12 vols. in a display case (1889-90) designed by Jan Vercruysse. For this project. Graham expanded Humperdinnck's brief score-extension for Richard Wagner's to its eventual point of return to the original musical link. In 1990 he revised the piece as a musical installation for computer and speakers as Parsifal (1882 -38,969,364,735). The music itself was later released commercially as a CD titled Verwandlungsmusik: Highlights From Parsifal (1882-39,969,364,735), published by Espace Art Contemporain, Saint-Etienne (France). There are other variants.
- 6 More recently these life-size portraits are framed as painted aluminum lightboxes with transmounted chromogenic transparency, such as The Gifted Amateur, Nov. 10th, 1962 (2007), Betula Pendula Fastigiata (Sous-Chef on Smoke Break) (2011), Basement Camera Shop circa 1937 (2011), or Canadian Humourist (2012), recalling Jeff Wall's classic format, and are ironic, "other" lives for himself, or nostalgic would-be memories of family life in mid-century North America.













Michael Snow, ABOVE That/Cela/Dat (2000), installation views. RIGHT Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids) (2002), frame enlargements. Images courtesy the artist.

All these works blend theatre with television, drama with dream. The viewer ricochets from place to place, as a disembodied eye penetrating the visible space of the screen, as embodied screen and embedded protagonist, as audible commentator and self-aware interior voice, as image on screen and invisible director.

Michael Snow and Stan Douglas have continued to elaborate the performative aspect of the projected image in later works.

With That/Cela/Dat (2000), a silent, continuous video installation comprising three 17-minute loops (as two television monitors flanking a central wall projection), Snow expands on his cinema film So Is This (1982, color, silent, 43 minutes) for a gallery environment. The "conversation" constituting the work seeks engagement with mobile viewers who may stay only briefly before moving on to other gallery works or installations; the one-word-at-a-time on the screen (in English, French and Flemish, for its original presentation in Brussels) discusses "here" and "there," anticipation and attention.

The single image of Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids) (2002) appears directly on a white wall, a one-hour image of an open window with curtains flapping gently to incoming breezes with accompanying sound.

Another window is suggested by Condensation- A Cove Story (2009), a silent, projected time-lapse photosequence where sun and shadow, fog and flickering light overtake a distant image of cliffs and shoreline.

In these works the author is invariably engaged in selecting, presenting, and implicitly discussing the images he imagines for our later consumption. Digital imaging has finally enabled the long, unedited take, just as it permits the obsessively assembled sequencing of thousands of individual views, time folding into itself or extending on indefinitely through the looping persistence of viewing and reviewing.

Stan Douglas takes time and infinity in a different direction, with his "recombinant narratives" that rearrange individual scenes to form narratives that may actually repeat only days or weeks later, perhaps never. With Win, Place or Show (1998) the two-screen video installation assembles a constant and random reshuffling of vignettes featuring two arguing actors enclosed in a cramped

apartment. The later Klatsassin (2006) echoes the storyline of Akira Kirosawa's Rashomon, refigured for a nineteenth century frontier drama in Northern British Columbia as a tale of miners and natives and mismatched, conflicting stories. Seen through 840 permutations the narrative shifts in meaning, and truth is elusive, shuffled in a present that tumbles past and future together.

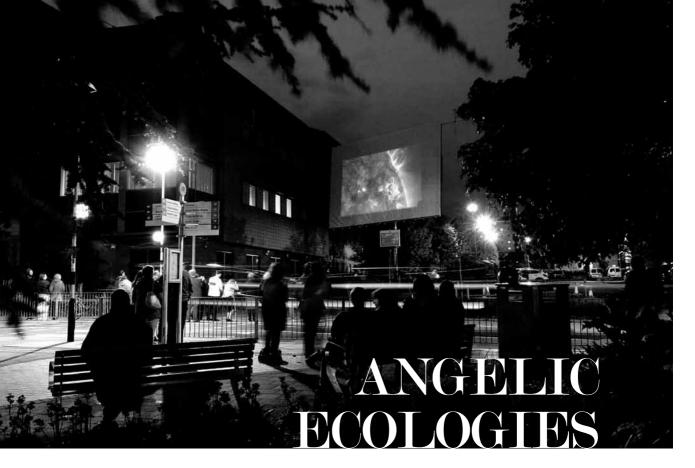
Throughout the works described, we see an overall shift toward the incorporation of time-based media in highly visible and much celebrated works by artists. Performance remains at issue here, as does the physical and psychological place of the viewer: cinema theatre or public gallery and museum. The viewer has become a flâneur, negotiating a locus inside the linear narrative of moving camera and unfolding vista. In an enclosed gallery or museum space there is another view as well, towards a world of past experience. The viewer is both spectator and participant with an active mind and an assessing, engaged eye.

Public space and commercial consciousness are now fully integrated with personal media everywhere, including the Internet, iPod and tablet, smartphones, Blackberries and handheld carry-everywhere perfect little computers. The path to this place is crooked and irregular, its trajectory distorted by the prism-effect of its pooling, flowing, water-like environment. This new world is fully at home with the new view and revised sightlines.

NOTE

Portions of this text originated in an essay titled "Bent Ladder" (2008), prepared for the catalogue with the traveling exhibition, Projections, curated by Barbara Fischer, University of Toronto. The publication date remains unannounced.

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SEAN CUBITT

The Millennium Film Journal was founded in the year of the Amoco Cadiz disaster. The impact of the Green movement that ensued on film and video arts is traced in Scott MacDonald's The Garden in the Machine (2001). Over the last 35 years, the idea of 'nature' that inspired the first environmental activists has become more complex, aided by the rise of digital networks. The sense of what constitutes an environment, and what our relationships to what environs us might be are integral to our mediascape. This paper attempts to describe this changing concept of environment.

Migrating from photochemical to optoelectronic media since 1978 brought with it a radical increase in built-in obsolescence (Fossati 2009, Lockhart 2012). The environmental burden of electronic equipment, in terms of resources, manufacture, energy use and waste has become a matter of concern for artists working with this equipment. Some have developed works that variously recycle old technologies or decline to take their power from the grid. Thus, Chris Meigh-Andrews' Sunbeam uses a solar-tracking array (photovoltaic cells that follow the sun's arc during the day) to power a night-time projection of processed images from NASA's Solar Dynamics Agency,

the content and the process matching. The piece appeals to a cultural history of solar energy and the symbolic power of plants, like the daisy and the sunflower, that track diurnal rhythms in their behavior and growth. Weathergroup_U's 2008 Sydney Biennial installation retelling climate stories of Ramingining and other indigenous elders was powered with solar panels. Janine Randerson's installations not only track the experiential side of climate change, but do so using renewable energy, at the same time acknowledging that the conditions of workers in the Chinese factories that produce solar panels, and the extraction of the materials required for their production are by no means socially or environmentally neutral.

As Randerson argues (in conversation), meteorological art has to do something beyond communicating the evidence of climate science, or it is no more than public relations. If art is (and this is unclear) distinct from design, then it must be because design provides solutions, where art asks questions. In this sense, another group of activities lies right along this border, as is the case with access_space, the Sheffield (UK) based group who collect redundant computers and set up workshops to train unemployed and other disenfranchised people to rebuild them on



the basis of open source/open access. The virtuous circle they establish is in one sense a design solution. But it is clearly also a critical practice. George Yudicé points out that today, arts funders want not only art but evidence of economic, social, educational and moral benefits for participants — benefits which are otherwise lacking precisely because of policies instigated by the governments and corporations whose own culture ministries and philanthropic foundations make these very demands of artists. It is in this sense that access_space's work should be considered in the same breath as art: these projects critique the processes that enable them, acknowledge contradictions, and continue on despite them.

The principle of breaking open the black box of media technologies to make them work is by now deeply entrenched in the glitch aesthetics of a post-punk digital arts scene. It takes only a small step of imagination to read Cory Arcangel's Super Mario Clouds as a requiem not only for an 8-bit childhood, but for the innocent blue skies and fluffy clouds before Three Mile Island and Chernobyl taught us to watch the weather with something more like dread. In this instance, Arcangel's soldering-iron mod of the NES game first delights with its simplicity,

but after a while, as the identical clouds lockstep across the screen in relentless perfection, some inkling of the untrustworthiness of the weather — its function as bearer of bad news - passes into the cartoon clouds. In their turn, the now disturbing clouds strike you as increasingly digital, and though the piece was made in 2002 before the mass marketing of cloud computing, already the sense of the digital as an environment of its own, and a potentially toxic one at that, gives the piece its longevity and its power, even for those who did not grow up on console games.

Rosa Menkman's Collapse of Pal (2010) in some sense also rehearses a nostalgia for the recent media past (Parikka 2011) — in this case a lamentation for the end of the old PAL analog TV transmission standard, replaced across Europe during the first years of the 2010s. Menkman works on the electronics of a VHS camera to obtain glitched signals which are recorded as digital files, accompanied by

> OPPOSITE Chris Meigh-Andrews, SunBeam (2011), installation of screen onto solar array, Preston, Lancashire, England.

ABOVE Rosa Menkman, Collapse of PAL (2011), frame enlargement. Images courtesy the artists.

a soundtrack derived from similar processes and subtitles typed-in in real time, rehearsing a version of Benjamin's (2003) story of the angel in the Theses on History. It is notable that between opening and closing passages of a close-up face (the artist's? or the angel of PAL?), the longest passage clearly derives from a landscape viewed from some kind of moving platform, reversing the relation of the scrolling in Super Mario Clouds, but giving to land and sky the same uncanny status. The visionary landscape has a deep history, traced in MacDonald's book to the Hudson River School, and though in European, Asian or Australasian contexts the references might be older, there is a hint of the Romantic sublime, or indeed the Romantic agony, in Menkman's version. Like the landscape viewed from the train in Robert Cahen's Juste le temps of 1983, or ten years earlier another landscape seen through a windshield in Phil Morton's Colorful Colorado, processed using Dan Sandin's analog video synthesizer (see Cates 2013), landscape gifts itself to video, rather differently than how it does to film. Video's horizontal traverse through the playback head encourages any imperfections in the image track to move parallel to the horizon: and any glitches therefore to express themselves most often as horizontal perturbations. This sense that the landscape is a signal, or performs like a signal, passes into the idea of signal as landscape, a landscape that Menkman's angel views piling up in ruins at her feet.

The lesson of both the struggle to produce nonpolluting media and to retro-engineer art by disassembling and rebuilding hardware is that moving image media not only reflect environments: they are themselves integrally bound up in the fate of the physical planet through their physicality, and at the same time are in the process of becoming environmental themselves. The video signal becoming landscape is the precursor of the transformation that has overcome the human world since 1978: the enveloping environment of data. This follows the first two great moments of environmentalization in the history of capital. Since the 16th century in Europe, and throughout the world during the colonial epoch, land was taken out of the commons, made private property, and its inhabitants alienated from it. This is how land became environment, the thing that surrounds — the not-us. In the Industrial revolution, the handcraft skills of generations of laboring people were taken from them and turned into the automata of the factories that now embodied weaving, spinning, knitting, smithing. Alienated from their own skills, the new workers were subjects of factory discipline, alienated inhabitants of industry. In poor times, knowledge that was once indistinguishable from existence has been parceled out as data, stored in databanks, of which we have become alienated servants and subjects. The increasingly ominous and mournful expression of the natural world as signal heralds the exclusion of its long-term common owners from the datascape.

As land, skills and knowledge became alien landscapes, media artists have been in an increasingly strategic position to observe and comment, to explore and undermine, to resist and to create alternatives. A new sense of the media arises, in which media not only observe, but mediate alienation. From farming, handling and knowing the world, we have passed to a state where humanity has retreated into the body, and the body itself is in the process of being 'other-ed' and colonized, becoming the environment for pharmaceutical and food industries, genetic modeling and cosmetic surgery - a place to inhabit, rather than to be. In many respects it is that sense of environment that seeps out of Arcangel and Menkman's two works: a sense of being adrift in a world that one way or another fails to exist.

Though not in any obvious sense an environmentalist film, John Akomfrah's The Nine Muses (2011) plays into this challenging world. Built around the myth of the muses and the figure of the wanderer from Homer to Derek Walcott, The Nine Muses plays landscape as sociology. The bitter winter of 1962-3 that greeted so many of the New Commonwealth migrants appears in newsreels, grey and white, cold even to watch, between delirious shots of a man in a yellow parka in the Alaskan wilderness, his face always turned away from the camera, the yellow always punched up against the rock and snow and leaden skies. The displacement is tangible: in the soundtrack's moves from classical actors reading classic texts to the patois of migrants and the slander of politicians and 'ordinary' racists; in the interchange of location sound and snatches of classical music; and most of all in the movements between archive film and location digital HD video, the latter crisp, with the hard outlines of edge-finding tools in the camera or post-production. The ruins of the old century persist in the new, just as imperial colonialism lives in the journeys undertaken to an imaginary motherland. The winter is both a tangible, bone-chilling shock and a metaphor. And it is this doubling over that places The Nine Muses as also a film of environments: of how a place exists three times — in imagination, in inhabiting, and in memory. The ferocious little Englanders defend 'their' land, already bought and sold, from these Odyssean wanderers, for whom migration was, in imagination, a homecoming, despite the paucity, the ordinary ugliness, the icy winds and icier hearts. "It is equal to living in a tragic land / To live in a tragic time," as Wallace Stevens has it. The environment of The Nine Muses is history, history played against memory.

The importance of the film is its refusal to allow history to become data, to allow the record of facts to overcome the insistence of living. The inference of the poems and prose read on the soundtrack is the universality of the migrant condition, as well as its difficulty. In a world that has been turned into environment, we are all estranged; and to refuse the obligation of hospitality



John Akomfrah, The Nine Muses (2011), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist and Smoking Dogs Films. © Smoking Dog Films 2011.

is a way of siding with the alienation that environs. The process of becoming that haunts Akomfrah's interviews about the film concerns the way geography welcomes or does not welcome. The Alaskan wilderness is punctuated by ships, roads, sheds, a geography that always evokes the term it can never live up to: pristine.

In Akomfrah's work (he once made a film called The Last Angel of History), we should hear the angel of Rilke's Duino Elegies who knows "that we are not really at home in the interpreted world." The beauty of the world either engulfs or refuses us: that is the angelic moment. A similar dialectic runs through Woody Vasulka's Art of Memory (1987). The New Mexico landscape of canyons and deserts is home to another angel of history, a brooding figure on a mesa's edge, who at one moment swoops snarling down on the hapless wanderer who tries to take a photo of him, pins him down into the datascape. Against the recognizable photography of landscape, Vasulka plays treated footage from key moments of war: footage from Spain, Germany and Russia at the heart of the last century, and the confession of Oppenheimer, the atomic bomb scientist, his face a mask translated into angelic or demonic inhumanity, intoning the words of the Bhagavad Gita: "Now, I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." This landscape is the very one that Oppenheimer was recalling when he made that speech, the territory of the Trinity test of July 16, 1945. The highly visible war, the war captured

by the newsreels of the 1930s and 1940s, became in that moment an invisible war, an ultimate camouflage, when the landscape became — as it would again after Rachel Carson, and again after Three Mile Island and after Bhopal and after Chernobyl — the outward sign of an inward disgrace.

The anti-sacrament of nuclear weapons testing opens a different perspective on voyages and arrivals in Auckland artist Stella Brennan's South Pacific (2007), made with David Perry, in which ultrasound scans of a model airplane underwater intercut with nose cam shots of the endless Pacific on the long haul flight from Aotearoa to Los Angeles, while a voiceless text crawls across the screen evoking the wartime occupation of the South pacific by the US Air Force, with its mythology of Rogers and Hammerstein, and its strange realities, such as the (misnamed) 'cargo' cults of John Frum on Tanna, one of the most remote islands of Vanuatu. Supposedly the indigenous Vanuatans built ritual airstrips to entice the airborne foreigners to return with more goods; but the Americans dumped their excess at Million Dollar Point in the Solomons, and the islanders are still trying to reclaim the land they laid under concrete for their landing strips. It was from these islands that Enola Gay set off over sparkling seas towards Japan and Hiroshima. It was here in the South Pacific that the atoll at Bikini would be destroyed, with the fallout still in the water two generations later. In Brennan's





Bill Viola, *I Do Not Know What It Is That I Am Like* (1986), video stills, photograph by Kira Perov. Courtesy the artist.

video, the re-filmed seat-back nose-cam footage reads at once as ocean and as noise — lost signals — like the noise that finally overwhelms Menkman's *Collapse of PAL*, or the striated skies zigzagged with distortion that interrupt the brooding angel (like Dürer's *Melancolia*) of *Art of Memory*. The land bears memories, in forms other than those of geographic information systems, that the angels recall, and in their position as messengers between worlds, observe from the place of a becoming that is never realized.

Or else experience the pain of the all-too real. In Patricio Guzmán's *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), telescopes occupy the position of the angels, huge, stately installations in the Atacama Desert, gazing patiently through dry air

into the million-year-old past of light. As the film unfolds, equally patiently, other times come into view: the pre-Colombian shepherds who left their carvings, and later their textile-bundled mummies; the Indians and itinerants whose bodies lie in open coffins in the endless dry winds amid a clustered forest of crosses by the abandoned miners' shanties of the 19th century, and then at last the women who still persist in returning day by day to sift the desert dust for fragmentary remains of their loved ones, among the 30,000 or more tortured, killed, and 'disappeared' under Pinochet. "The present doesn't exist" says one of Guzmán's astronomer informants, comparing the time it takes light from the sun to arrive with the

takes signals to traverse the human nervous system from epidermis to brain.

The open vistas of the Atacama, its horizons of mountains, its overarching sky by day and by night, evoke in the opening minutes of Guzmán's film an empty world, in which the observatories stand as strangers. But that illusion is gradually brushed away, like sand under the archaeologists' brushes, or the rubble shoveled from a mass grave at Pisagua, an abandoned mining town used as a prison camp under the dictatorship. One archaeologist opines "It is as if the past accuses us" -- as much as the past, it is the land itself: the Indians who inhabited it for 10,000 years only to 'disappear' in the fifty-year saltpeter boom from the 1860s to the 1910s, and the prisoners brought from the cities after the coup. The land is the past, and makes the present difficult to isolate. Film itself proves this: the single frame is not the unit of film, but the frame framed by the frame before and the one after — an extended present. "Those who have no memory live nowhere" the voice-over tells us near the close of the film; the present is the extension of the past, and if there is no past, the present simply does not come to be. This is why we need angels — observatories, archaeologists, the women of the disappeared — to make it possible to become.

A sequence of extraordinary evocative power is introduced by a strange atonal music that becomes the noise of spoons, still hanging up by strings in an abandoned shack, rich in verdigris but solid enough to clang together in the persistent wind. Messengers between past and present, human and environment, they evidence the persistence of memory. That too is the function of cameras. Bill Viola's I Do Not Know What It Is That I Am Like (1986) or Mary Lucier's Plains of Sweet Regret pore over, respectively, animals (especially birds) and the ruins of miscellaneous modes of inhabiting the Great Plains, asserting in both instances the absolute power of electronic imaging not to represent but to convey. Even the imagined archipelago, constructed from video footage and mathematical functions, of Dan Sandin and Tom DeFanti's CAVE VR series From Death's Door to the Garden Peninsula (2008-10) speaks to us of a way of being in and of the world, constructing a world we might want to belong to, extending the mental spaces of pure math that Sandin so often works with to convey the strange belonging that occurs when you follow a mathematical argument into its counter-intuitive world of abstractions.

Environmental videos and films are, each of them, angels of land, machine and data. They harvest the alienation, and turn its contradictions back into openings on vistas of living otherwise — living wise to the other. Nostalgia is in these works, not as a refusal of the present, which in any case disperses in front of the camera, but rather as a means to unlock closed futures, to insist that

there a future must develop, to loosen the thingliness of being, to recognize in being only the result of becoming alien to our current environments. To imagine what it would be like, if we gave up the struggle to stand apart, and became ourselves our own environment.

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PHYSICAL OPTICS A RETURN TO THE REPRESSED

IMAGES LEFT to RIGHT

Simon Payne, *Window Piece* (2012), looping video projection, installation view. *Film in Space* exhibition, Camden Arts Centre. Courtesy the artist.

Emma Hart, Blind (2006/2012), Installation view at Camden Arts Centre. Courtesy the artist.

The Horse Hospital, exterior view, photograph by Des Willie. Courtesy The Horse Hospital.

Denise Hawrysio, Score for Future Performance (1989/2012), installation view, *Film in Space* exhibition, Camden Arts Centre. Photo: Andy Keate © Camden Arts Centre.





A.L. REES

The UK is witnessing an extraordinary rise of interest in the experimental arts of the 1970s — not in a fetishized or imitative way — but rather complete with new artists, works, and programmers. It doesn't map directly on to the fatuous analog/digital divide — lots of the new wave use digital media, mobile phones and networks, while others persist in making 16mm and 8mm films and expanded cinema. These diverse tendencies are in a direct line of descent from the seventies, and from the experimental film movement in general.

In this respect, they contrast sharply with largeformat gallery video, the dominant mode of the last twenty years, which largely eschewed or did not know about the avant-garde ancestors. As gallery projection wanes after its extraordinary and hegemonic rise in the art world, a less grandiose and more investigative film art emerges in its wake. Filmmakers have come back like revenants from their ousting by "artists who make films," a coy phrase that, from the mid-1990s, legitimized film as an art form (at last) in the gallery context and its culture.

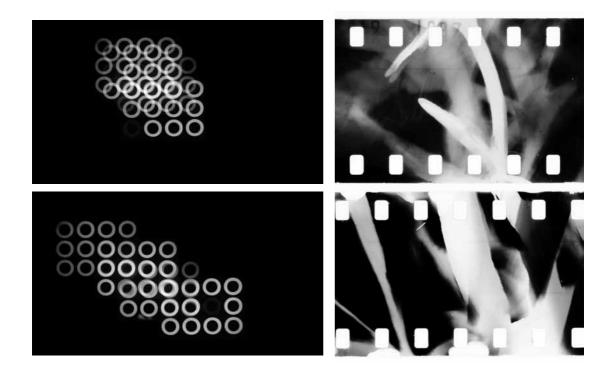
2013 saw an explosion of the new materialism in a variety of London and regional venues, with many crossover artists and ideas: an uncoordinated rolling festival of latterly repressed tendencies in artists' cinema. Overall, 'physical optics' is their major trope, in which flicker, abstraction, loops, direct light and projection in physical space are preferred to HD video, the fixed screen and the wandering spectator, which was the gallery's default mode of viewing. The presiding spirit was seen in Guy Sherwin's curated exhibition "Film in Space," at the Camden Arts Centre (December to February 2012/13),

featuring classic 1970s expanded cinema by Malcolm Le Grice, Lis Rhodes, Annabel Nicolson and many others, alongside newly commissioned films, digital projections and intermedia art.1

Sherwin explored every way of showing films in galleries, except the clichéd row of empty chairs in front of a screen. Visible projectors and multi-screen projection characterized the overt physicality of the exhibition, challenging the hidden illusionism of cinema. But it was far from medium-specific in the narrow sense, by including paintings, prints and light projections or installations (as in an arched window filled with color flicker-frames by Simon Payne, Emma Hart's Blind for slide projector shutter and motorized venetian slats, or Denise Hawrysio's ineffable non-film, Score for Future Performance, in which folders of blank plastic sheets on a Perspex lectern are illuminated when passing viewers trigger a light-sensor, but which does not otherwise elicit their participation). Zero moments and reductions are often a sure sign of a new turn.

Camden Arts Centre is a 'proper' public gallery, a spacious Victorian building that shows modern and contemporary art. By contrast, most of the action in 2013 was in converted factories and club-style venues, as with many avant-gardes since — and long before — the seventies. The Horse Hospital in Holborn — its original gratings, ramps and drains are still there - hosted a night

> 1 http://www.camdenartscentre.org/whats-on/view/ exh-25.



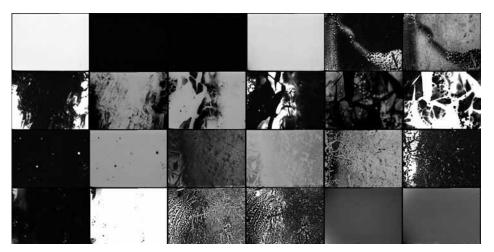
of direct cinema early in the year, with the 4-projector Rings by Nicky Hamlyn, providentially reworked from a 1970's original; a live-feed video walk to the gallery by collective-iz artists Deniz Johns and Karolina Raczynski; and photogrammed rosemary bushes by Cathy Rogers that yield barbed flurries of traces and imprints, recalling Bazin's vision of photographic automatism ("Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty".). 2

In the same show, Amy Dickson performed the paracinematic Light Time, in which rows of candles burn traces of light into heat-sensitive fabric sheets that act as a screen facing the audience. Dickson's lucid and terse statement echoes seventies' materialism without copying it: "Using a thermochromatic screen this piece explores the idea of light as the material substance of 'film': light's movement, flickering and informing time. Melting flickers out leaving trace-line marks — a temporal document to the action."3 It was seen again at 'Nightworks' in April, the most extensive and experimental of these recent events. In the neo-Underground setting of a cavernous old dairy, converted to an art space, it featured time-lapse, pinhole and looped films, with digital video projections and live performances, notably Raczynski's Signals for hand mirrors and audience, linked by Skype to Berlin.

Dickson showed another version of her candlelightwork a week later at a very different and unexpected location — the National Portrait Gallery near Trafalgar Square. Here, freelance programmer Ben Pritchard screened three sessions to accompany an exhibition of Man Ray's portraits.4 The Man Ray connection was explored through 'direct cinema' and photograms in the spirit of his Return to Reason (1923), from dyed and handpainted films by Harry Smith and Len Lye to digital color abstraction, light-play and contemporary minimalism. Pritchard riskily showed new experimental work by younger artists — for some it was their first public screening — to an audience presumably attuned to classic dada and surrealism but not its latter-day wayward offspring. He chose process (i.e. direct cinema) over image as the guiding principle, mixing 16mm and digital projection, live performance and music.

The stylish cinema at the Portrait Gallery gave way a few days later to camp-chairs crammed into the Lo and Behold gallery in Brick Lane, for 'Analogue Recurring', with new 16mm work hosted by David Leister, whose enthusiastic DJ-style Kino Club injects much-needed humor into the experimental scene. Some of the films were hesitant first steps, but there were two outstanding pieces. One was Karel Doing's two-screen TestseT, also shown at the Portrait Gallery in digital format, is a two-screen abstract palindrome in black and white made from film scraps and waste, one screen in positive and the other in negative. The other was Sally Golding's eye-ripping color flicker film performance Ghost-Loud+Strong, with strobing and a distorted horror-film soundtrack, exemplifying her "physiological cinema of ghost-shows".

Doing and Golding are staffers at no.w.here in Bethnal Green, east London, the UK's centre for artists' 16mm and 8mm filmmaking. Karen Mirza and Brad



OPPOSITE LEFT Nicky Hamlyn, Rings (2012), film still. Courtesy the artist.

OPPOSITE RIGHT Cathy Rogers, Rosemary, Again and Again (2013), film still. Courtesy the artist.

ABOVE Kare I Doing, TestseT (2013), frame enlargements. Courtesy the artist, Karel Doing © 2013.

RIGHT Sally Golding, Face of An Other (2009), live performance still, photograph by Steven Trigg. Courtesy the artist.



Butler opened no.w.here in 2004 after the 2001 collapse of the first LUX Centre, exiled from fashionable Hoxton Square by rising rents and a bad lease. The LUX survived and regrouped, still distributing the former London Film Makers' Cooperative and London Electronic Arts collections, and promoting new film artists, but it lost its cinema and discarded its film production equipment. This was rescued and reinstalled by Mirza, Butler and workshop leader James Holcombe, so that the original Co-op equipment from Le Grice's day still functions as a material link across the generations.

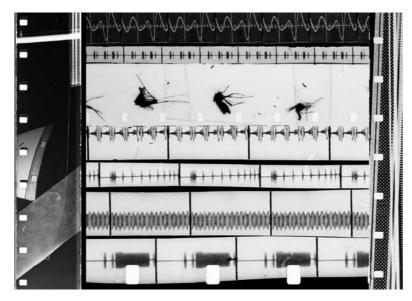
The moment was timely, since 16mm film projection exploded into the art world just as no.w.here was founded. Film has taken a severe battering since then, with the closure of many labs and facilities, and the uncertain future of film stock. The film business paid no heed to the vigorous campaigns (notably by Tacita Dean) to sustain the film medium for artists. High-profile appeals to Deluxe in 2012, for example, were to no avail, and it closed its 16mm labs in Soho anyway. So much for the benevolence of the culture industry, run by big or lesser moguls who boast modern art collections but whose interests are ruled by profit.

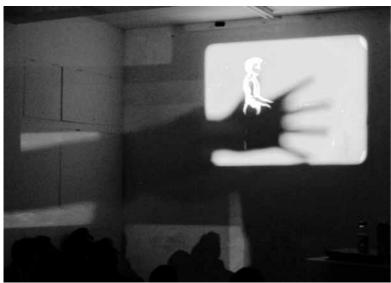
This crosscut of the UK scene connects it directly to the era of experimental film and video movements that flourished in the 1970s and for some ended there, or which was said to have eviscerated in the "state of profound crisis" detected in 1985 by Paul Arthur and many others.5 The project at that time was to expand and question the cinema and its language, through the lens of a marginal art form. Its practitioners rarely called themselves artists, but rather filmmakers, uneasily located — as this trend still is — at the fringe of the art world. As precursors they unwittingly laid the ground for a new phenomenon, gallery video,

- 2 http://www.thehorsehospital.com/past/live-past/ now-and-here/.
- 3 http://fieldworkrca.wordpress.com/nightworks/.
- 4 http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/late-shift-1/filmmovement-in-light-pure-figures-in-motion-12042013. php.
- 5 Paul Arthur, A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film Since 1965 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 151.









TOP LEFT Sally Golding, Super

Grotesquerie (2010), live performance still, photograph by Bryan Spencer. Courtesy the artist.

TOP RIGHT Sally Golding, Psycho-Sub-Tropo (2011), live performance still, photograph by Collectif Jeune Cinema. Courtesy the artist.

MIDDLE Sally Golding, Composted

Memorial (2009), film strip collage created from original footage from live performance. Courtesy the artist.

BOTTOM Still from Unconscious Archives live event, London (2011-2013). Dirk de Bruyn live at Unconscious Archives. Courtesy Sally Golding.

which moved centre stage in the mid-1990s with the largescale multi-monitor installations of Bill Viola and Gary Hill. Gallery video expanded rapidly, increasingly shorn of any feedback to and from the experimental cinema, and more amenable to the art world ethos.

The new physical optics itself contains contradictory impulses. Often ruthlessly materialist, it also attracts the rhetoric of phantasmagoria and hauntology. It is largely digital, but explicitly rooted in frame-based and structural cinema. It visibly employs hard and soft technologies, devised for quite other purposes, to undermine the stability of viewing and promote an art of transience. But whether it turns to natural and landscape sources (which in fact dominate), or is generated by digital color or by found footage, it overwhelmingly asserts the non-persistence of vision, or the ineluctable flow and ungraspable substance of the screened image. Like all critical cinema, it carries the negative in its definition.

The kinds of work that I've associated with the seventies for the purpose of comparison to contemporary work - roughly, the video art and structural film of the era — wasn't the only model at the time, any more than its putative equivalents in today's overcrowded media arts scene. Political documentary, narrative experimentation and neo-Brechtian film drama all jostle for art and cinema space, and these had their exact counterparts in the late seventies when materialist film and video was similarly a minority trend, characterized in part by its claims to theoretical rigor.

Often denounced, this 'theoreticism' - since it offers a critical position — may have prompted its rediscovery by new filmmakers now that the boom years seem to be over for the ideological supplement of the moving image to the art world. Far from swamping alternative and contrarian experimentation, the Internet spreads its viral message by making available films and writings that were near-invisible for most of the period reviewed in this issue. The survival of MFJ, and its expanded field over that time, reveals a live tradition to which journals are still key, now including the first two UK artist-led print journals (Sequence, MIRA)) since the lamented demise of Undercut (in 1990) and Filmwaves (in 2009).6

Books and publications — massively expanded since 1978 — fuel new trends but do not cause them. That comes from the perceived needs of filmmakers themselves. The web has buttressed rather than wiped out film's radical aspiration, by providing new kinds of film access and experience. It is more of a natural home for radical cinema than the art scene, since it is hard to imagine much of the new film work making sense as a limited edition or a signed copy. It exists in and through exhibition, preferably collective, and undermines any objecthood it might possess. This brings it closer to digital space. Without knowing that the interested reader can find them online

almost instantly, I would have been more nervous here about making so many fleeting references to new and faraway works.

Even so, I hope not to have painted too narrow a picture. The events outlined here are replicated elsewhere in the US, Europe and Asia (as seen daily on the invaluable Frameworks site, hosted by Pip Chodorov from Paris via Jonas Mekas in New York, and another live link in all senses). Many 'seventies' artists are still active, making new work and re-enacting or digitalizing seemingly lost projection/ performances from thirty years back. Lux, no.w.here and a score of other groups and film clubs in Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham support courses, debates and screenings. Much of the flavor is international, as with Holcombe and Golding's 'Unconscious Archives' held at Apiary Studios and Café Oto, featuring intermedia film and sonic art from Canada, Australia, Korea, France and Japan that "transverses noise core and vision spectacle."7

When quizzed in later life about the problems faced by abstract film pioneers in the 1930s, veteran Polish filmmaker Stefan Themerson modestly made light of them, but in a 1945 letter to a friend, the director Aleksander Ford, he was not so sanguine:

When I think of our youthful years with film, I am reminded of the struggle for bits of film stock; for prediluvian cameras; for work benches cobbled together from odd sticks; for thousands of bits of paper from customs and the censor, which one had to get, come what may, just to see the avant-garde films from the West from which we had been isolated by a fortified wall.

He adds that he is "overwhelmed by feelings of friendly envy" for new avant-garde filmmakers to come, who will "find in their own hand the apparatus they need for this art."8 That vision, at least, has come true.

> 6 http://www.movingimagenetwork.co.uk/miraj/ (edited by Catherine Elwes); http://www.no-w-here. org.uk/index.php?cat=9&subcat=main (edited by Simon Payne).

7 http://sallygolding.com/unconscious-archives.

8 PIX 1, Winter 1993/4, London, p. 110. Also cited in "The Films of Stefan and Franciszka and Stefan Themerson," LUX DVD notes, p. 8, and in Tomasz Majewski, 'The Themersons: Kinetic Collages', The Themersons and the Avant-Garde, (Museum Sztuki, Lodz, 2013), p. 83.

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ON THE TRANSITION FROM ANALOG FILM AND VIDEO TO DIGITAL MOVING IMAGE

CATHERINE ELWES

There is a forward momentum with digital video, an urgency that's lacking with film, which is just dying [...] Video is constantly improving. — Ken Jacobs1

In the last twenty years, the gradual ascendency of digital technologies has given rise to widespread lamentation in experimental circles where, it is said, the 'dematerialized' digital image has sounded the death knell of film. The distress caused by the threat of obsolescence is derived partly from the genuine predicament faced by filmmakers whose resources for the processing of film have been gradually withdrawn, culminating in 2011 with the closure of the last 16mm lab in the UK. This 'calamity' triggered vociferous protests in London, which were led by Tacita Dean, whose monumental installation, Film (2011) at Tate Modern, stood as paean to the glories of analogue film at the very moment of its demise. Of course, having suffered Death 24x a Second,2 — film enacted a series of triumphant resurrections in multiple guises principally in that of the melancholy object of historicism — we are living, as Thomas Elsaesser remarked, "a very paradoxical moment where to be new is to be retro, where going vintage is to be avant-garde."3 Others adhere to the medium for its indexical and artisanal properties, attributes that seem to guarantee direct access to the ever-receding social and material real. As Jonathan Walley perceptively intuited, celluloid enthusiasts also embrace the stuff of film as a form of "self-reservation in the land of new media." In terms of political agency, it has been argued that analog film deploys its unique material existence as a point of resistance to the infinite reproducibility of commercially-produced digital artifacts. Another response to celluloid death by algorithm is the recourse to an 'aesthetics of ruin' doubling as a memorial to lost time — featuring crumbling facades and revenants briefly summoned from their archival grave and re-subjected to material decay. Embracing cyclical and regenerative rather than linear temporalities, this approach is often presented as a challenge to the concept of progress enshrined in modernity. Traces of this philosophical position are evident in contemporary reworkings of Tony Conrad's substance abuse of the 1970s by artists such as Bradley Eros and Steve Woloshen, who, like Conrad, subject the film strip to violent attack by pickling, drowning, baking or, in the case of Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder, to "death by projection." 5 In a recent article on hand-made films, Martine Beugnet and Kim Knowles have put a positive gloss on this return to the auratic, organic matter of film. They argue that paracimematic techniques employed by artists such as Alia Syed and

Frédérique Devaux provide not so much an opportunity to indulge in fetishistic nostalgia for a defunct medium, but a strategy for "reflecting on the aesthetic, political and environmental implications of the production of obsolescence."6

There is no doubt that retrospection in all its forms can shed light on present conditions. Furthermore, there is overlooked potential still to be unlocked in obsolete technologies, from Fisher Price video cameras through vintage record players to Casiotone electronic keyboards and Game Boys, formats that have been assiduously mined for their creative potential by artists from Sadie Benning in the 1990s to Gijs Gieskes in the 2000s. However, there is also a danger that an obsessive return to outdated technologies and the concomitant plundering of the film archive, both avant-garde and mainstream, results in less time spent on creative responses to the rather more urgent issues facing us in contemporary life. However, it is not my purpose here to demean those tantalizing granular peep shows into the past, nor debate the virtues of celluloid allegiance in the computer age. My interest is to highlight the difference between the strategies of resistance to the passing of film in experimental circles and the distinct lack of trauma attendant on the progression from analog video to today's digital formats. In short, why have most video

- 1 Ken Jacobs speaking at the 'Roundtable on Digital Experimental Filmmaking', October 137, Summer 2011. Available online: http://www.mitpressjournals. org/doi/pdf/10.1162/OCTO_a_00057. Accessed 26 June 2013.
- 2 In Death 24 x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image (2006, Reaktion Books), Laura Mulvey analyzes the advent of digital video in terms of how it has transformed our relationship to the film canon. With a new ability to freeze frame, slow down and rewind digitized film, the 'still heart' of film, its structural make up as a succession of static, photographic images is newly revealed.
- 3 Thomas Elsaesser speaking on "The Poetics & Politics of Obsolescence" at the AHRC Artists' Moving Image Research Network seminar, 15 June 2011, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London. Extracts from the seminars are available online: http://www.movingimagenetwork.co.uk/ seminars/. Accessed 25 June 2013.
- 4 Jonathan Walley speaking on "Not an image of the death of film..." at The Expanded Cinema conference, Tate Modern, 17 April 2009.
- 5 Jonathan Walley, ibid.
- 6 Martine Beugnet and Kim Knowles, 'The aesthetics and politics of obsolescence: Hand-made film in the era of the digital' (2013), MIRAJ 2:1, pp. 80-90.



Jochen Gerz, Prometheus: Greek Pieces #3 (Performance) (1975), video still, photograph by Gerz Studio. Courtesy Gerz Studio. Wilhens-Lehmbruck Museums, Duisburg. © Jochen Gerz, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013.

artists made a virtually seamless transition to the digital environment where many of our colleagues in film theory and practice have suffered such complications over the loss of analog film? 7

Part of the answer must be that when the heterogeneous content gathered on film, video, photography and computer graphics was 'remediated', ironed out in a common digital processing and delivery system, many of the medium-specific properties of analog video survived the transubstantiation more or less intact. This might seem unexpected because at its inception in the mid-1960s, video shared with experimental film a modernist focus on its material processes, inflected by an aesthetic derived from the eventless plains of minimalist painting and sculpture. Like structural filmmakers, video artists adhered to the dogma of truth to materials and produced works that explored the intrinsic qualities and capabilities of the apparatus, for example: video feedback (Nam June Paik), vertical roll (Joan Jonas), time lag (David Hall, Peter Campus), duration (Nan Hoover, Robert Cahen) and the cognitive dissonances created by the audience's inability to distinguish pre-recorded material from live footage (Vito Acconci). Artists such as Mary Lucier, David Hall and Jochen Gerz drew attention to the susceptibility of the vidicom tube to burning by 'hot spots' of intense light that, with sustained exposure, left indelible marks. Gerz demonstrated this congenital weakness of the analog video camera in Prometheus. Greek Piece No. 3 (1975), in

which he reflected the sun directly into the lens with a hand mirror, permanently blinding the tube and gradually obliterating his own image over the 20-minute duration of the work.

Analog film and videomakers in the late 1960s and early 70s found themselves aligned in their common adherence to a materialist doctrine coupled with modernist reflexivity — most often achieved by forcing apparatus malfunctions that shattered the smooth surface of representational verisimilitude. The early congruence in approaches between the two mediums soon ruptured to reveal fundamental differences, both technical and conceptual. Unlike film, the analog video signal is a remote entity dependent entirely for its existence on the presence of an electrical current activating a machine capable of reading the encoded information embedded in the oxide coating of the tape. It was not possible to hold the tape up to the light and reveal to the naked eye, frame by frame, the secrets of the electromagnetic signal. In principle, the tape could be artificially damaged by introducing grit and dust to create 'drop out', an effect that resembled miniature comets shooting through the frame, trailing black tails. However, analog video failed to offer up a surface to be painted, scratched or chemically manipulated within a conceptual logic of operational causes producing calculable effects on the projected image, as was the case with film. Even a minor attack on the videotape would result in the total seizure of the apparatus with the familiar refrain "it chewed my tape" ringing out in the exhibition space, studio or auditorium. Stuart Marshall pointed out that with analog video, "interventions can only be made at the level of the technology of image production and reproduction itself [...] the producer is always kept at a distance from the actual electronic processes of image coding and registration."8 This meant that artists were less likely to develop a symbiotic relationship with the technology. In fact, the remoteness of the image was seen as a positive advantage by artists such as Marty Saint James in the UK, who characterized the abstraction of the video signal as analogous to the free play of thought. The American artist Hermine Freed was of the same mind and expressed it in these terms: "I used to fantasize about a machine that could take automatic audio-video readings

of my thoughts."9 These disembodied thoughts would act like memes flowing through a human host and dispersing into a local and global network of similarly open-ended, sensate stations. Individual musings, predominantly transmitted as simultaneous voice-over, produced thought messages that ranged from the most intimate of interior monologs to the bald hectoring of artists like Kevin Atherton in the UK who wanted to cure us of our passive viewing habits. In the USA, Acconci delighted in insulting his audience from inside a monitor, and every political polemicist with an urgent message to convey also cast their thoughts into the videosphere.

As the French-Canadian artist Hervé Fischer wrote in 1993, "a thought laid upon a videotape is a thought capable of being broadcast everywhere at once in naked communication."10 This MacLuhanesque vision of global connectedness was fundamental to analog video practices partly because of the ease of copying and the independent distribution of videotapes, but also because of the potential, through broadcast, for artists to reach mass audiences. This ambition was realized mostly on cable broadcasting in the USA. In the UK, artists made significant, if short-lived inroads into mainstream terrestrial broadcasting during the radical days of Channel 4 in the latter half of the 1980s. The digital age required video artists to make what amounted to minor conceptual and practical adaptations, when distribution 'anywhere at once' became an online reality. The personal statement, the video confidence, the political diatribe, the 'minority' perspective: all these video-based practices migrated painlessly from analog video to their online equivalents in the digital age.

Although many video artists had pursued the materialist mode of practice prevalent in film, linked in video's case to fine art models and locating its outcomes as often as not within gallery settings, the nature of analog video technology — the immediacy of the medium, its long recording time (real time), its portability, its simultaneous recording of picture and sound (and therefore of voice), its ease of use and the instant feedback of the image - lent itself more readily to discursive approaches, as outlined above, which engaged directly with the signifying practices of dominant cultural modes. Stuart Marshall has argued that a combination of feminism and semiotics provided the modus operandi for 'oppositional' video art to infiltrate the network of 'texts' that formed the cultural environment.11 With varying degrees of success, artists challenged the ideologies encrypted in mainstream media, principally television. Broadcasting, even public service broadcasting, was regarded as serving the interests of power in 1980s UK, when power was concentrated in the Thatcher administration, itself allied to big business and the rapidly deregulating financial markets.

The introversion inscribed in a modernist dedication to form and material was unsuitable for the new critical engagement with the language of mainstream media and, although formal innovation was a feature of 'agit-prop' video, the levels of abstraction espoused by hard-core structuralism were abandoned by those who adopted analog video as a major weapon in the armory of liberation politics. In the UK, video artists and activists supported campaigns from abortion on demand to the struggles of the striking miners who were attempting to resist the dismantling of the coal industry.¹² For artists associated with the stable of video activists dedicated to the democratization of culture, in the UK exemplified by Sue Hall and John (Hoppy) Hopkins at Fantasy Factory, the advent of digital video simply made life easier. With its new lightweight, handheld technology, with the convenience of computerized desktop editing and the perfect copies that could be produced, with the infinite, instantaneous transmission offered by the internet, digital video with its enhanced mechanisms of production and distribution seemed like a natural extension of what polemical, discursive artists were already doing.

There is a sense in which analog was always already embroiled in the digital domain. Many early videomakers processed and synthesized video footage with analog machines, often built by the artists themselves: Peter Donebauer in the UK, the Vasulkas and Nam June Paik in the USA, Robert Cahen in France. However, these pioneering analog technologies were quickly superseded by digital processors, including Quantel Paintbox, which became available to artists in the mid-1980s. Practitioners

- 7 This article will favour the view from the United Kingdom from where I hail and where, in the late 1970s and '80s, I contributed to the burgeoning video culture of the Thatcher years.
- 8 Stuart Marshall, 'Video: From Art to Independence. A Short History of a New Technology,' in Diverse Practices: A Critical Reader on British Video Art ([1985]1996), University of Luton Press/ACE pp. 60-70.
- 9 Hermine Freed in Video Art, an anthology (1976), Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot (eds.), New York/ London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p. 51.
- 10 Hervé Fisher quoted by Catherine Elwes in Video Art, a guided tour (2005), London: I.B. Tauris, p. 18.
- 11 See Stuart Marshall, 'Video: From Art to Independence. A Short History of a New Technology', in Diverse Practices, op. cit.
- 12 In 1984, Chris Rushton, Mike Stubbs and Roland Denning created The Miner's Tapes, made with the cooperation of the striking miners and their families and distributed through the unions and community support

were then involved in the slightly incongruous process of presenting video tape originals to post-production houses who fed them into digital machines. From the back of the edit suite, artists would orchestrate myriad optical effects and then watch in amazement as the technicians flicked switches and a magically compiled master would be regurgitated back onto videotape.¹³ When the whole process became digital it cut out two cumbersome steps and, once the equipment was affordable, it allowed artists

- 13 In the mid-1980s, Channel 4 television commissioned a number of video works by artists. The generous budgets (by the standards of the day) allowed for hiring Soho post-production facilities used mostly by film and music video industry producers, who, I am told, always demanded to see what the commissioned artists had been doing the day before.
- 14 Malcolm Dixon, 'Vide Verso: Video's Critical Corpus' in REWIND..., op.cit.
- 15 Telephone conversation with the author, 26 June 2013. For a broad technical as well as aesthetic history of video, see Meigh-Andrews's A History of Video Art; the Development of Form and Function (2006), Oxford/New York: Berg.
- 16 There was, of course, direct physical contact with the machines, with what Ed Halter calls the 'physical data carriers' and many artists immersed themselves in players and monitors, circuitry and wires, the hardware and eventually the software supports of analogue video, but the image itself would always remain tantalisingly out of reach.
- 17 Sean Cubitt 'On the Reinvention of Video in the 1980s', in REWIND; British Artists' Video in the 1970s and 1980s (2012), Sean Cubitt and Stephen Partridge (eds.), New Barnet, UK: John Libbey, pp.161-177.
- 18 Barber also included works by the Duvet Brothers, John Scarlett Davis, Sandra Goldbacher & Kim Flitcroft, John Maybury and Jeffrey Hinton.
- 19 Jeremy Welsh, 'One Nation Under a Will (of Iron), or: The Shiny Toys of Thatcher's Children' in Diverse Practices; a Critical Reader on British Video Art, Arts Council of England/University of Luton Press, pp.
- 20 Staged at the Ambika 3 gallery in London, Hall's installation consisted of 1001 cathode ray TV sets that were tuned to the different terrestrial channels. As each channel was switched to digital, the sea of monitors gradually reverted to a field of white noise and hiss. See also, Steven Ball, 'The end of television: David Hall's 1001 TV Sets (End Piece)', MIRAJ (2013), Intellect Books, pp.132-139.

to work with image processing independently of postproduction houses and without the necessity for big budgets. As Chris Meigh-Andrews recently remarked of the transition from analog to digital video, "we did it in steps, but we were already working with a malleable signal that was stored and processed electronically, and displayed electronically."14 The video image, even before it was subject to digital transformation, began life as a thin, dematerialized image, existing at the level of coded electrical impulses and inaccessible to any form of physical contact.¹⁵ Digital video maintained this remoteness and for video artists, it was, in this respect, more of the same.

Like Meigh-Andrews, Sean Cubitt identifies transitional steps in the evolution of analog video that would lead to the new world order of the digital. In a recent essay, he cites 'pre-digital' works such as Jez Welsh's I.O.D (1984) and Tina Keane's In our Hands Greenham (1984) in which the artists project pre-recorded video footage onto respectively, spinning cardboard cut outs and women's hands. By these means, Welsh and Keane were able to "secure the kind of complex layering of images associated with digital tools, which only became available to video artists in the later years of the decade."16 Once the stratified image — fragmented, repeated, multiplied, solarized and colorized — could be wrought electronically, works such as those George Barber compiled into his Greatest Hits of Scratch Video; Volume 1 (1984),¹⁷ highjacked and 'remediated' into a video vortex any number of external sources: off-air television (flagrantly disregarding copyright), videographics, text, archival film released on VHS, and newly recorded footage documenting the events of the day. Barber's Tilt (1984) displayed the same "stylish irony" that Jez Welsh identified in Dara Birnbaum's guerrilla videos,18 both breaking the monopoly of broadcast television on the interpretation of world events. By reducing appropriated images of commercial film and television - cowboys, the Grand Canyon, recreational sports, the American flag into an electronic play of decorative surfaces — Barber not only gestured towards the inexorable spread of American culture and, by implication, the interests of corporate America, but he also celebrated a particularly British version of the counter-culture based on an irreverent attitude towards authority and tradition. Aided by every sharp-edged digital trick in the book, Scratch's brand of satirical mash-up now has been honed into an unstoppable creative force of resistance by the YouTube generation.

The discussion so far leads to the conclusion that many of the political objectives, working processes and distribution strategies established by analog video survived into the digital age. As a result, I would suggest, contemporary digital moving image in all its forms owes as much, if not more, to analog video than to any other predecessors, and this may well explain the felicitous



David Hall, 1001 TV Sets (End Piece) (1972-2012), exhibition view. Courtesy the artist. Photo © Michael Maziere.

graduation of video artists from the groundbreaking, but also backbreaking technologies of the U-matic era to those of the digital, and the bemusement some of us feel at the grieving associated with the eclipse of analog video's celluloid cousin. However, as David Hall celebrates the final days of analog broadcasting in his monumental 1001 TV Sets (End Piece) (2012) 19 we might well ask — have we forgone anything other than our memories with the demise of analogue video? Few of us will lament the loss of cumbersome machines, their unreliability, the mangled tapes and the anxiety of travelling by subway where the magnetic fields created by the trains were said to wipe the fruits of our labor. However, analog video with its bleeding colors and visible scanlines traps the lineaments of our youth and can still conjure the excitement of working at the margins of the art world and of broadcasting — the place of the outsider somehow always felt the surest place to be. Analog may well encapsulate the deluded certainties of youth, but it also represents the time of collective endeavor for which one can perhaps feel justifiably nostalgic. Malcolm Dixon observed that in the late 1980s, just as the project of late capitalism was gathering pace, social changes took place that found their echoes in experimental practices: "the video collectives of the late sixties and

early seventies began to dissolve and along with that the principle of the anonymous collective advocating shared ownership on ideas and production, which gave way to 'name' artists and 'signature' artworks."20 As digitization has smoothed the path of the moving image from the margins to the mainstream of gallery and museum culture, and creative thinking has been progressively commodified with both academic and public arts funding being squeezed, it is salutary to observe the spirit of collectivity shifting onto the internet where interest groups form and mutate, quite independently of the art market, using video as their primary means of communication — just as we did in the age of analog 'drop-out.'

With thanks to George Barber, Chris Meigh-Andrews and Sean Cubitt for answering my technical and historical questions.

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Jerry Sims, Bob Fleischner STAR SPANGLED TO DEATH

PREVARICATION DAY

Is anything more American than the lie? Whistleblowers threaten America's existence. See how the nation convulses when the truth threatens, lashing out like a crazed behemoth.

Bullshit is valued, we have a hugely rewarded advertising industry. Pitiful is the sucker who depends on advertising to learn the truth about anything, and what is off-limits to advertising?

Let us acknowledge the lie as fundamental to what we imagine as our history, and devote one day each year to thanking God, Lord Of The Whoppers, for this miraculous ability, this invaluable and exceedingly profitable trick: the substituting of fiction for fact.

Let us dump the exhausted pageantry -boring even to the kids- and get right to it, updating Thanksgiving Day to Prevarication Day.

Ken Jacobs



THE OBJECT OF FILM **ANALYSIS**

MICHELE PIERSON

The essay you are about to read marks the first time in history that an analysis of movies in a print journal refers to individual frames of those movies by number, with readers having a playback medium that allows them to display the frames and sequence cited in the text. This is not a trivial development. It represents a historical turning point in the evolution of the cinematic apparatus.

- Gene Youngblood, "Metaphysical Structuralism: The Videotapes of Bill Viola," Millennium Film Journal 21/22 (Fall/ Winter 1988-89).

Scholars make use of DVDs, Blu-Ray discs, or Vimeo uploads for the analysis of films all the time. While the list of experimental films released on commercially distributed DVDs continues to expand, it represents a tiny fraction of the work being made, and scholars writing about the work of living filmmakers also benefit from artists' willingness to make films not otherwise available in these formats available for study. The changes that have facilitated these

exchanges between artists and scholars are: the move to digital editing by a number of filmmakers who shoot and show their work on 16mm film; the choice, by other artists, to shoot on digital video; and the desirability, for both, of having digital files that can be sent in any number of formats to curators or festival programmers.

Today, the film scholar wishing to write about contemporary Hollywood cinema, or just about any other of the world's cinemas, watches films at home, on the same kinds of screens and in the same video formats that most people watch them. Caetlin Benson-Allott makes the point that as far as Hollywood is concerned "movies are now primarily videos for both their makers and their viewers."1 "The spectator," she writes, "has left the theater." Not only is this not the case for experimental film, there is no reason to think it ever will be. The people who go to experimental film screenings do so because they think it is important to see films in the circumstances filmmakers imagined for them when they made them, and because these are the only circumstances in which the vast majority of them will ever be available to be viewed. What makes writing about experimental film different from writing about other types of cinema is that while experimental films are made for theatrical exhibition, this is not how





scholars view them when they want to analyze them. This essay considers some of the implications of this situation. How, for instance, might we understand the relationship between the image of a film after watching it over and over again at home, and the experience of viewing it in a theater with an audience? What are we describing when we analyze a film? If this is not the first time such questions have been asked, they have been less often asked about the analysis of experimental film than about the analysis of other types of film.

The descriptive term 'film' is used in this essay, with reference not to the means of its production but to where it is shown. There are all kinds of ways in which those means matter, and matter not least of all for film analysis; but for most people who make, program, and write about experimental film they are not what makes that work a film. Pastourelle (Nathaniel Dorsky, 2010) and The Pettifogger (Lewis Klahr, 2011) are both films. The questions I want to raise about the object of film analysis are different, then, from those of Dan Streible who, in an essay concerned with questions about the terminology film scholars use

> OPPOSITE Phil Solomon, American Falls Triptych (2000-2012), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist.

TOP Nathaniel Dorsky, Pastourelle (2010), still image. Courtesy Gallery Paule Anglim.

BOTTOM Lewis Klahr, The Pettifogger (2011), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist and LUX, London.

1 Caetlin Benson-Allott, Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship From VHS to File Sharing (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013), p. 1.

2 Benson-Allott, Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens, p. 24.









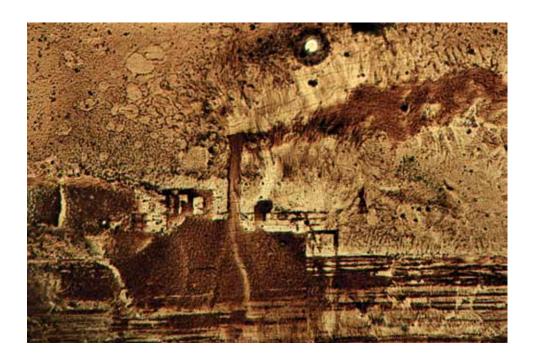


to describe their object of study, writes: "Film historians and Film History [An International Journal] now face a basic historiographical problem of naming their object of study. What will the word film mean from this point forward?"3 The problem, he suggests, with using the term 'film' to refer to works "that never had anything other than a digital existence" is that it contributes to the occlusion of the material differences between "analog film and digital files"— an occlusion that the film industry, with its move to digital projection, obviously benefits from. Not least of what makes the question Streible poses a valuable one is that it points to important differences between the institutional practices of mainstream and experimental film exhibition and scholarship. For if the use of the term 'film' does not present the same historiographical problem to film and art historians who write about experimental film (or for Millennium Film Journal), this is because analysis of the material specificities of experimental film has historically been central to scholarly studies of it.

The spaces of experimental film exhibition (the purpose-built, repurposed, and commandeered theaters attached to museums and archives, cinematheques, media arts centers, microcinemas, universities, and, especially since the early 1990s, film festivals) have also always been more discursive spaces than mainstream cinema spaces. Films shown in these spaces are almost always accompanied by program notes, which mostly, if not always, include basic information about their production. People who regularly attend screenings of experimental

film may complain about after-show discussions that drag on for too long or get taken up with questions they are not interested in hearing the answers to, but the longstanding practices of introducing films, and of engaging in after-show discussion with filmmakers or people with a special interest in the work (curators, critics, scholars and other artists), all make space for reflecting on the material specificities of the work. When someone balks at a question to a filmmaker like "what did you shoot it on?" it is not because the answer is not worth knowing, but because a better question could open up a discussion about the formal decisions that followed from it.

The spaces in which experimental films are shown are also the only spaces still equipped (or prepared to install temporary equipment) to show films in multiple formats (although in 2013 even New York's Museum Of the Moving Image had to postpone retrospectives for two experimental filmmakers while a lamp for its 16mm projector was acquired).4 The best theatrical projection systems realize a scale, and level of image and sound quality, not reproduced in the conditions in which DVDs and online videos are often viewed at home. More significant, however, is the fact that the film is unlikely to be screened again in the same city any time soon. Theatrical exhibition remains the principal form of exhibition for experimental film but, as far as any one film is concerned, it is also a rare occurrence. Watching a film in a theater setting, especially (but not only) for the first time, means not being able to fully master it. Even for experienced viewers, any attempt



to map its methods of producing connectivity, its temporal rhythms and structure, and its materially and formally articulated gestures, is bound to remain incomplete. Films viewed in these circumstances have the potential to engage viewers in intensely sensory and emotional experiences that have something to do with the type and scale of projection; something to do with the experience of concentrated attention that, at least sometimes, comes with being part of an audience, and quite a bit to do with not knowing when the chance to see them like this will come around again. Whether experimental filmmakers are opposed to the distribution of their work on DVD / Blu-Ray or amenable to it, they make films to be seen in these conditions.

Of course films made by artists can be found in the darkened rooms of galleries. There are also films, such as Phil Solomon's American Falls (2010), which was an installation before it was a film, and films such as Ken Jacobs' Star Spangled To Death (1956-60 / 2001-4), which, having existed in different versions over many decades, was given one last edit for DVD release. But the vast majority of experimental films made in a continuing tradition of artisanal filmmaking are made for theatrical exhibition. In cases where an experimental film has not specifically been conceived for theatrical exhibition — Andrew Norman Wilson's Workers Leaving The Googleplex (2009-11) was made, for instance, with the design features of a viral video in mind, was uploaded to YouTube (and Vimeo), has been screened at numerous film festivals and

as a gallery installation — theatrical exhibition is still a key site of institutional and peer recognition.

Unlike the situation of the film critic, whose review of a particular experimental film or program of films most often includes something about the occasion and location of the screening, and is usually published as close to the event as possible, the situation of the scholar is one characterized by more — considerably more — time for repeat viewing. With more time and opportunity to study the film closely, the object of film analysis shifts for the scholar, from the film projected for an audience, to the film viewed over and over again on computer screens and/or televisions. In his 1979 essay, "A Bit Of History" Raymond Bellour described the frustrations of trying to analyze films from memory or notes scribbled in theaters in the dark. At the end of the 1970s, it seemed to him

> LEFT Andrew Norman Wilson, Workers Leaving the Googleplex (2009-2011).

RIGHT Phil Solomon, American Falls: The Maid of the Mist (2000-2012). Frame enlargements. Courtesy the artists.

³ Dan Streible, "Moving Image History and the F-Word; or, 'Digital Film' Is an Oxymoron," Film History: An International Journal, vol. 25, no. 1-2 (2013): p. 227.

⁴ Difficulties repairing and finding parts for commercial model 16mm projectors has meant losses of these projectors for many university theaters.

that the desire for closer contact with the film (classical Hollywood film) was "sustained by two demands: one for a greater material intimacy, the other for a greater conceptual precision." The instrument of material intimacy and close scrutiny was then the editing table. Just over a decade later, Bellour remembered this instrument of analysis in the introduction to a collection of essays in which he wrote: "You are in darkness. On the small rectangle of the editing table, imagery goes by. Slightly clenched on the control, your hand feels the image. It feels, it knows, it thinks it can control the image. Yes, but for what image? In the name of what image?"

The editing table, LaserDisc, VHS, DVD, and Blu-Ray players are all past and present instruments of analysis, which in Bellour's words, enable the scholar to take their time over the image. It is time that no other way of viewing the film allows for. The moments of film analysis when such instruments reveal themselves are moments concerned with detailed description and, in particular, with offering precise accounts of temporal sequence. So, for instance, we read in P. Adams Sitney's close analysis of the way Robert Beavers' Sotiros (1976-78/1996) uses text to evoke speech that: "Twenty seconds into the film, after three shots, we read, 'He said,' in white letters on a black background on the left side of the screen. After another five shots, 'he said.' appears on the right side, again in white letters against black. This pattern recurs twenty-one times until, after several minutes, a final 'He said,' appears without the closing counterpart." Here, we get an account of temporal sequencing that can't be grasped with this level of precision while watching the film in a theater. After further description, Sitney ends his analysis of the start of this film with the suggestion that: "The film encourages its viewers to read the montage as represented speech while at the same time it resists any systematic mapping of it."7

There is no question that Sitney, who for the purposes of his analysis had access to copies of some of Beavers' films on VHS tapes, has seen these films projected for an audience a number of times, over more than thirty years. For other viewers, opportunities to see Beavers' films are

5 Raymond Bellour, "A Bit Of History," in *The Analysis* Of *Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 10. First published 1979.

6 Raymond Bellour, "Between-the-Images," in *Between-the-Images* (Zurich: JRP | Ringier & Les presses du réel, 2012), p. 13. First published 1990.

7 P. Adams Sitney, "Beavers's Third Cycle: The Theater of Gesture," in Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 351.

limited by the fact that they can't be rented through any distributor of experimental film in the US and Europe. As far as Sitney's analysis of *Sotiros* is concerned, we might say that having a copy to hand has enabled him to describe the film in enough detail to recreate it in the minds of readers who have seen the film; to aid readers who have not seen it in creating an image for themselves; and to give past and future viewers an analysis of the film they can compare their own experiences to. But what else might be said about the image of the film produced through analysis — and not just about the image of the film produced through this analysis, but about the image of any film produced through close, film analysis?

On the one hand, we know that film analysis cannot but produce a new object: the film as the scholar, reviewing it at close range, and in the light of a research question, an idea, sees it. Less clear is the relationship between this new object and the film screened for an audience. The moments of film analysis when the generally undisclosed nature of this relationship may raise questions for a reader are those suggesting how a film addresses its viewers, or how the film may be experienced, since it is at these moments that the question of where this is happening potentially asserts itself. One way of understanding the relation between the object produced through film analysis and the film screened for an audience might be to think of the image produced by analysis through the metaphor of superimposition: as a reading that is composed from, and retains aspects of, two kinds of viewing experiences. An alternative to this understanding of film analysis might argue that even though analysis derives its understanding of the film through repeat viewing and close scrutiny and aims to produce a version of the film that will be recognizable to someone watching it with an audience, it does not reconstruct the theatrical experience.

Only this second way of understanding the relationship between the image of the film produced through analysis and the film screened for an audience, makes clear, first of all, what is specific to the kind of analysis that depends on having the film to hand, and secondly, leaves open the possibility of attending to the specificities of theatrical exhibition. There are, after all, many things scholars can do when they write about experimental film besides analyze films, and even when they do offer close, formal analysis, it is rarely the only form their discussion of films takes. Scholars can and do also talk about the spaces in which experimental films are screened, and engage in thinking about how watching films at a particular time and place is shaped by those circumstances. It is just that it might be helpful to think of these two modes of critical activity, film analysis on the one hand, and on the other, analysis of the phenomenological and/or culturalhistorical conditions of viewing, as separate (and, as far as possible, to make them differentiable for readers).



Robert Beavers, *Sotiros* (1976-78/1996), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist and Temenos Archive. © Robert Beavers.



Lewis Klahr, The Pettifogger (2011), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist and LUX, London.

When scholars writing about films made on 16mm or 35mm film gave up the editing table for the VCR and DVD player something was, of course, lost. The material intimacy that Bellour wrote about in 1979 — minimally the ability to engage with the film at the level of the frame — was given up for another kind of intimacy, the intimacy of a film one lives with. This kind of companionableness with a film is one scholars writing about all kinds of films now enjoy. The difference for the scholar writing about experimental film is that very often only the scholar, or a select group of viewers, enjoys this kind of relation to the film being discussed. The question is does it matter?

Every scholar who also teaches knows that having films in formats that students can spend time with makes it much more likely that they will be taught, and that scholarly books on teachable films are attractive to university presses. So, to the extent that editors look at potential book sales when considering whether or not to publish a book on experimental film, students' access to the films being written about does matter (even if it is not the only criterion informing editors' decisions). On the other hand, the obstacles that artists interested in the commercial distribution of their work on DVD or Blu-Ray have to reckon with include the small scale and limited resources of specialist distributors, lack of funding, and, in some instances, concerns about legal action over music used without permission from the copyright holder. After receiving funding from the Wexner Center for the Arts (Ohio State University) to produce a DVD box set of several films made since the mid-1980s, the legal advice Lewis Klahr received was that he would be personally

liable in the event of a lawsuit for copyright infringement. It was not a risk he could afford to take.

Experimental filmmakers have every reason to want to control how and where their films are screened. Our understanding of them as art and cinema depends on it. Film analysis, on the other hand, demands and has come to depend on filmmakers' willingness to hand over some of that control. To some extent, of course, the choice has already been made for them. Because if there is anything to be learned from the entertainment industry it is that, one way or another, digitalization means relinquishing any idea of complete control. The same digital files that have enabled experimental filmmakers to share their work with scholars, curators, and other filmmakers, both online and in any number of other video formats, are also now stocking new underground screening rooms — torrent sites such as Surreal Moviez and Karagarga. There are curators who use these sites to uncover films for programing, and scholars who use them to access films not otherwise available for home viewing. File sharing, they will both privately attest, begets films for analysis.

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Nam June Paik, TV Crown 1, 1965 (1998-99 version).

Manipulated color television set, silent, with two audio generators, two amplifiers, and one heat regulator. Dimensions variable. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photograph by David Heald ©The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

NAM, JUNE PAIK'S

AND INTERVENTIONIST, PARTICIPATORY MEDIA ART

GREGORY ZINMAN

Question the signal. Attack the apparatus. Embrace noise. Let mistakes guide creation. The origins of Nam June Paik's installation, TV Crown (1965/1998-99), stretch back before the scope of this anniversary issue, yet the artwork's high-profile restagings have resulted in a piece whose later iterations have been seen by a far greater number of viewers than its earliest one. Indeed, TV Crown raises a number of issues at the heart of contemporary experimental media practice. It presents TV without video, sound that is only silence, and an idea whose material manifestation changes over time. TV Crown also provokes us to consider how today's experimental mediascape, one characterized by remix, glitch, and data-moshing, among a host of digital techniques, emerges from a long line of works that demonstrate how artists' interventions into media processes forces us to rethink media's meaning. Furthermore, it points toward contemporary media aesthetics — and ethics — at the same time that it accentuates a continual return to ancient dreams of sensory and media convergence. TV Crown, today revived and reconfigured, expresses a desire evident throughout the history of art to probe the boundaries between artistic mediums and practices, as well as a particular preoccupation with material investigations into the medium specificity of moving images.

The treated television piece first appeared in 1965 as a single black-and-white RCA television, and was then re-envisioned with the help of Paik's collaborator Jung Sung Lee in 1998 with a color Samsung and inexpensive digital components. At the same time, Shuya Abe — Paik's partner in developing his video synthesizer nearly two decades earlier — contributed a different re-creation of TV Crown using analog parts. Now on view as part of the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Nam June Paik retrospective, TV Crown currently takes the form of three televisions, arranged in a row like cathode-ray totems. Viewers see one Samsung, one RCA, and one Sony CRT set, each with brightly-colored and hypnotically-moving abstractions playing across their screens. One image resembles fluttering, interlocking rings; another, a rotating atomic cell structure; the third, an undulating, rainbow-hued Mobius strip. The sets sit atop anodyne office furniture-style cabinets whose glassed-in shelves

house audio amplifiers. Two of the sets are connected to analog tube amplifiers and two signal generators apiece, while the third is hooked up to two digital Sony amplifiers/receivers.

To make the piece, Paik removed the deflection yoke that sends signals to the guns that fire electrons onto the phosphorescent surface of the CRT screen, and removed the focusing coil. He then reattached the yoke on the side of the electron guns and added a companion coil from another television, so that one yoke controlled the x-axis of the image, and the other, the y-axis. Normally, video signals are sent through the voke to the electron guns, but for TV Crown, Paik replaced video with audio, connecting the analog audio frequency generators powered by an amplifier to the CRT circuits. The generators can output sine or square waves. The controls allow operators to manipulate both the frequency of the signal, which changes the waveform of the resulting image on screen, and the attenuator, which determines the amplitude of the signal and, consequently, the surface area of the imagery onscreen. Although powered by audio signals, the piece is silent — an invitation for viewers to see sound move in real time.

TV Crown was also intended to be participatory. In its first incarnation, gallery visitors could touch the controls of the amplifiers in order to produce their own shapes and images. For preservation reasons, access to this feature is presently restricted, but in its purest instantiation, TV Crown offers the movement of sound that transmutes the senses — that is to say, in TV Crown, the aural manifests as the visual through the haptic. Paik's creation thus places him in a centuries-old continuum of artists' desire to visualize music through technology — from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century color organs to Oskar Fischinger's sprightly animations to John Whitney's computer films all while utilizing the "new media" of his day. With regard to Paik's particular materials, engineers and scientists had been trying to "see" sound with television as early as 1928. Special interest publications of the time offered detailed plans and diagrams to amateur electronic enthusiasts looking to build their own homemade televisions. The intention to reconfigure existing media, and do so by one's own ingenuity, is therefore not new, but rather persists throughout the twentieth century, even if the tools and means have changed. For Paik, the means came to include the people who beheld the artwork. So the artist's hand that would paint a picture, compose a photograph, or film a moving image is, in TV Crown, displaced onto the spectator's hand. It is the viewer — now a full participant in the piece — who manipulates the artwork's controls, which in turn produce the image.

In this way, Paik realizes a conceptual intervention into materiality on the level of electrical engineering, implicitly taking up László Moholy-Nagy's challenge to artists in his 1936 essay, "From Pigment to Light," to combine craft with machine aesthetics in order to produce new plays of light in time. Paik's manipulation of circuits and signals speaks to his deep knowledge of the properties and variability of the technology employed. The piece manages to retain the essential importance of the human touch in directly producing effects, but the hand is mediated, so that the technological agent between the hand and its material support moves from the camera to the amplifier control, as well as from the fixity of the composition on celluloid or magnetic tape to the indeterminate and immaterial play of shifting electrons on a phosphorescent screen.

Paik accomplishes this through a complete rethinking of the conventional use and reception of the televisual apparatus, transforming television from a reproductive medium that communicates from broadcaster to viewer, into a productive one that generates a feedback loop of information between artist and participant. Paik extended his experience of mechanically transforming musical instruments, especially the prepared pianos he built, played, and destroyed in the early 1960s, into the design and realization of a range of visual instruments that could be "played" - in the manner of light devices such as Thomas Wilfred's Clavilux of the late 1920s, an influence Paik openly acknowledged — to create moving image abstractions out of existing signals. Paik's investigations into the materiality of the television circuit spurred him simultaneously to situate his media art in relation to painting and to claim a relationship to the real that vaulted over film's indexicality — that is, the relation between moving image mediums and the objects and actions they putatively fix in space and time. He explains:

Film is chemicals; TV is electronics. There are something like four million phosphor dots on a twenty-one-inch color television screen every second; it is just like Seurat — you mix them in your eye. In film, you take from reality; in TV, you produce reality — real electronic color.¹

As Paik observed elsewhere, electronic color is not a function of application, as it is with paint on a palette, but is rather a function of time: an electrical circuit that opens and closes 21 million times a second.

In his conceptualization of "real electronic color," Paik draws inspiration from his friend and mentor John Cage, whose 1940 manifesto, *Credo: The Future of Music*, called for "photoelectric, film, and mechanical mediums for the synthetic production of music." In *TV Crown*, Paik also incorporates Cage's ideas regarding chance, creating a work with a high degree of indeterminancy, setting parameters for his instrument's performance that is then executed by others. The piece addresses another Cageian hallmark, the relation of noise to silence, so



Nam June Paik, TV Crown (two versions) both 1965/1999. Manipulated television set; color, silent. @ Nam June Paik Estate

famously heard in Cage's non-performance piece 4'33". In TV Crown, sound is both silent yet present, seen but not heard. Sound becomes variable, changing, and behavioral, responsive to the touch of the viewer/player, as well as subject to the conversations and movement of the people inhabiting the space of the gallery.

In this context, it is important to recall, technically speaking, what a wave is: "a disturbance or variation that transfers energy progressively from point to point in a medium and that may take the form of an elastic deformation or of a variation of pressure, electric or magnetic intensity, electric potential, or temperature." This definition helps to animate several additional readings of TV Crown, as a transfer of energy not only between circuit and signal, but also between artist and participant, one who shapes the image of the work according to the open design determined by the artist. A consideration of Paik's use of sound waves as a "disturbance" facilitates a further unpacking of TV Crown. By encouraging viewers to participate in the manipulation of the signal in order to enact abstract images, Paik intervenes in the normative conventions of television reception and image-making, inverting the relation of consumption to production, and presenting challenges to the increasingly commoditized world in which he lived, as well as to the cultural institutions that would subsequently seek to promote and preserve his work.

Paik's experiments with devices and distortion exemplify his personal desire to eradicate hierarchies between artist and viewer. Before TV Crown, Paik made other pieces utilizing audio signals, such as Kuba TV, which ran a reel-to-reel tape machine into to the television's CRT circuits, and Participation TV, which invited gallery visitors to speak into a microphone that was connected to a television. In Participation TV, the sound was translated into light waves, and the audio-generated patterns would appear in real time on a screen in front of the speaker. For the work that would develop into Magnet TV, Paik relied on combination of materials, collaboration, interactivity and chance. In a 1973 interview, he recalled:

I asked Billy Klüver to bring the heaviest magnet that Bell Labs owned for the show. But I never thought of putting the magnet on the TV screen. I just held it in front. During the exhibition, while the people were playing with the sets, someone put the magnet on top of the screen, and it made a marvelous picture. So my most famous work was not done by myself; somebody in that crowd did it. That's very funny.3

Paik's embrace of low-tech solutions and happy accidents, shot through with a prankster's delight in demythologizing art, were all hallmarks of his interventionist media practice. By placing the magnet atop the cathode ray

- 1 Kathie Beals, "Tv/Radio & Cable Week," The Journal News, January 1, 1984, p. 8.
- 2 John Cage, "The Future of Music: Credo," republished in Silence (London: Marion Boyars, 1995), p. 3.
- 3 Douglas Davis, Art and the Future: A History/ Prophecy of the Collaboration between Science, Technology, and Art (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 149.

tube surface, Paik was able to twist broadcast images into Lissajou spirals so that, in his words, the television was transformed into a "performative and sculptural instrument."4 Magnet TV thus married the design and manufacture of a new technological device with chance — Paik, or others, could change the images on screen by moving the magnet, but they were neither in control of the television broadcast nor able to fine-tune the distortions produced by the component materials. Here Cage's employment of the aleatory combines with Moholy's earlier call to produce new images out of a device designed to reproduce them. But Paik takes this one step further, conflating the act of destroying the normal broadcast image with the emancipatory act of allowing any interested party to take part in creating new pictures.

It follows, then, that Paik's persistent desire to rethink the use and mechanics of media in order to produce new imagery via a manipulation of their constitutive parts would establish him as a precursor to today's glitch, hacking, and data-moshing media art - made by artists such as Takeshi Murata and Cory Arcangel, the anarchic video game duo JODI, and theorist/practitioner Alexander Galloway's Radical Software Group. Describing one of the group's selfplaying video game consoles, Galloway explained, "I wanted to do something in the same spirit as when Nam June Paik put the magnet on top of the TV."5 These works similarly seek to purposefully disrupt and distort digital code in order to create new abstractions in time. Like Paik, they carry a social, or even political agenda. And like Paik, these artists posit a direct connection between an art that challenges the distinctions between media forms — think of Murata's psychedelic abstractions wrought from an early-80s film, or Arcangel's YouTubederived mash-ups of Paganini and Schoenberg - and a politics that challenges the distinctions between quiescent consumption and activist intervention.

Indeed, Paik's rejection of the idea of a teleological towards media technology's progression higher fidelity — employed in military operations, surveillance, and other modes of hegemonic control in favor of an art that instead "question[s] the signal" and productively destroys, functions to reorient our experiences by humanizing technology through dissent and provocation.⁶ By modeling the appropriation and unconventional use of television, Paik demonstrates the value in rejecting dominant media paradigms of use and reception, as well as the pleasure derived from taking literal control of media as a kind of personal visual instrument. If there is an indexical trace here, it is Paik's insistence that the real is to be found in the recognition of the present moment as a production — both material and conscious — of the "now."

That TV Crown's various iterations also confuse the question of "now" vs. "then" anticipates current theoretical debates about how new media recasts the idea of an artwork's "correct" form. The multiple dates associated with the piece indicate a prior existence. Indeed, TV Crown is not currently seen in its original manifestation. Rather, it has been superseded by an updated version. While confounding to many art historians and curators, this updating is of a thematic piece with much of Paik's work, wherein the artist continually stripped his own artworks for parts towards the creation of new ones. A CRT monitor, for example, would take on new life as the material support for a painting of a mountain. Paik also reedited and remixed footage into new configurations, so that footage of Allen Ginsberg chanting a mantra and ringing finger cymbals in the single-channel Global Groove (1973) would repeatedly find new currency, first as part of the 30-set media hydra of TV Garden (1974), and later as individual prints to be painted on in the 1980s, and finally as part of the elegiac multimedia installation Chinese Memory (2005).

Paik was never particularly precious about his media objects, preferring to think of them as mutable and portable, existing in different containers and in different versions. In fact, Paik repeatedly expressed a desire to democratize both access to and the production of art. And if TV Crown demonstrates a characteristic delight in shaping technological abstractions in time, that ability is increasingly in the hands any computer or mobile phone user. Brian Eno and Peter Chilvers' "generative visual music" iPhone apps Bloom and Trope, for example, appear today as a fulfillment of Paik's dream of "creating an electronic canvas," one that would allow children to "grow up with video synthesizer [sic] every home."7 These apps demonstrate, yet again, how art need not be merely contemplated, but instead might be toyed with and subsequently reworked in order to create new images, new sounds, and new ideas.

Paik's desire was to "humanize technology," a desire conceived in a cold war milieu where technology had achieved the terrifying capability of ending all life on earth. According to Paik, access to art would result in a generation of media producers, rather than consumers, and this shift would provide salvation for humankind.8 This new art would be, in his words, "without gravity," existing only as a signal - portable, mutable, and sharable.9 While whimsically expressed, such a shift from material object to the process of dematerialization — also accentuates an important through-line from the conceptual and collaborative art practices of the 1960s to today. Taken alongside the ideas that emboldened the non-object-oriented artworks developed by Fluxus, happenings, Group Zero, GRAV, and other collectives,

works like TV Crown demonstrate the degree to which later art theories and practices, such as Nicolas Bourriaud's conception of relational aesthetics in the artworks of the 1990s, or today's crowdsourced viral videos, to name just two, have their roots in Paik's particular historic moment, in which the traditional emphasis on the specific art object gives way to an interactive experience, and in which the audience is conceived as a community partaking in a continuously changing event that is not limited to a particular time or place. Paik's utopianism sees in participatory media the potential for the radical eradication of political rule, social boundaries, class distinctions, and aesthetic hierarchies.

At the same time, Paik's work expresses how the idea of play contains the seeds of radical thinking. In a 1982 review of Paik's retrospective at the Whitney Museum, critic Robert Hughes said that Paik had altered the television so that it had become a field of "pure play, electronic finger painting."10 This metaphor, perhaps not entirely intended as praise, has since become the reality of our current mediascape. Consider, for example, David Hockney's iPad drawings made with the iOS Brushes app, which allows one to "paint" with one's fingers. Paik's art, coupled with Hughes's criticism, also bring to mind Walter Benjamin's idea of "playspace," presented in the second version of his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," but excised from the more familiar third. "Playspace" refers to the ways mass media technologies have the power to dramatically expand humanity's horizons for experience. 11 Despite this utopian framing, we have seen, again and again, how the space opened up by these technologies is often immediately colonized and subsequently dominated by political and/ or economic forces.

By taking mass media, literally, into one's own hands, TV Crown foregrounds human interaction in order to critique the industrial and capitalist production from which it sprang. In so doing, Paik offers one possible solution to the simultaneously libratory and constricting impulses engendered by new media. "My job," he once told an interviewer, "is to see how the establishment is working and to look for little holes where I can get my fingers in and tear away walls."12 The legacy of Paik's prodding fingers can be felt in the millions of hands shaping digital culture's challenges to intellectual property, copyright, authorship, and control. Indeed, Paik's participatory media art synthesizes interventionist practice with humanistic principles and artistic intention with political consciousness, animated by an investigation into materiality that allows us to see our relationships with technology anew.

- 4 John Hanhardt, The Worlds of Nam June Paik (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2000), p. 117.
- 5 Electronic Arts Intermix, notes for Radical Software Group, Prepared Playstation 2 (2003), available at: http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=7984.
- 6 Paik: "Even so, I can't believe my eyes sometimes when I am looking at the color...There is a parallel between art history and TV. From Giotto to Ingres there is a steady search for more perfection in high fidelity. Then Monet made it low fidelity. TV has been searching for high fidelity, too. The whole electronics industry has had but one purpose to serve: reproduction of the original signal. They never question that signal \dots Electronics has thus been used for military purposes, for censorship, for eavesdropping. I want to make electronics more humanistic, more conscious of the problem of source materials—which isn't a difficult problem at all . . Therefore, now is the time in TV for low fidelity. Hi-fi is dead in music with Stockhausen and Cage, dead in marriage with Dr. Kinsey, and dead in TV with us." Quoted in Davis, Art and the Future, p. 152.
- 7 Nam June Paik, undated letter to unknown recipient, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Nam June Paik Archives, Box 2, Folder 21.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Nam June Paik, "Random Access Information," Artforum no. 19 (September 1980): pp. 46-49.
- 10 Robert Hughes, "Art: Electronic Finger Painting: A Flickering Retrospective for Nam June Paik at the Whitney," Time, May 17,1982. Available at: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/ article/0,9171,921231,00.html.
- 11 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," (second version), The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media, eds. Edited by Michael William Jennings; Brigid Doherty; Thomas Y. Levin; Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 37.
- 12 Calvin Tompkins, "Profiles: Video Visionary," The New Yorker, May 5, 1975, p. 79.

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AN INVISIBLE CINEMA

ANDY WARHOL'S FILMS, IN AND OUT OF VIEW

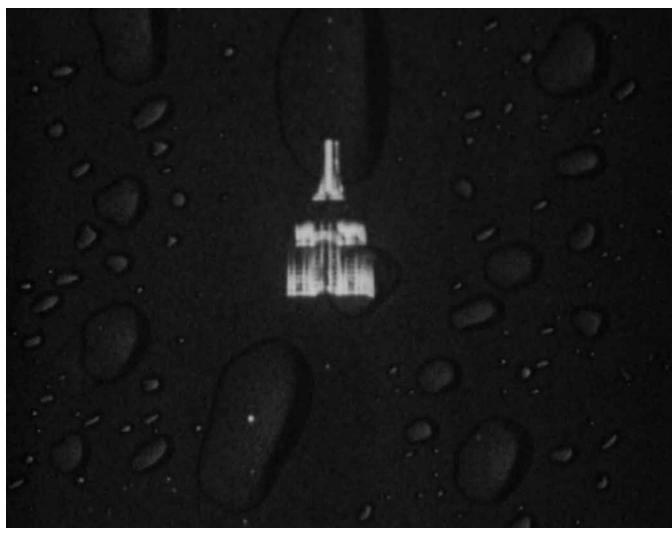
MAL AHERN

In 1978, film theorist Paul Arthur had never seen Andy Warhol's Empire. Neither had many of the critics and filmmakers who took this and other early Warhol films as inspiration. Yet Arthur claimed that Empire was so influential "precisely due to the manner in which it is missing." The film was "so immediately open to paraphrastic statement" that to merely hear it described was to share in its conceptual impact.1 Difficult to see, yet impossible not to think about, Warhol's cinema served as a rich site of projection and imagination for the avant-garde throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Warhol had pulled his films from circulation in the early 1970s. While a half-dozen of his films remained a part of Anthology Film Archives' "Essential Cinema" series, and stray prints showed sporadically in other locations, the majority of Warhol's films remained in storage until after his death in 1987.2 Arthur's discussion of Empire, published in issue number two of Millennium

Film Journal, shows that Warhol's films still exerted powerful influence at the dead center of this dormancy; or the idea of his films exerted influence, rather than the films themselves. For the mainstream, Warhol's films had represented decadence and sexual perversity. Filmmaker and critics Peter Gidal and Malcom Le Grice, founders of the UK Structuralist-Materialist movement, bracketed Warhol's content and emphasized the uncompromising fixity of his form. Meanwhile, books like Stephen Koch's Stargazer (1973) provided many with their sole accounts of Warhol's films — understandably, the book was riddled with errors.

Andy must have loved it. He adored rumors, especially as they regarded his own social circle. What better way to savor the strange insights gossip reveals than to set up the ideal conditions for its propagation? The porous production and exhibition space of the Factory was a veritable gossip-generating machine. A sensational



Andy Warhol, *Empire* (1964), film still. All images ©2013 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved. Courtesy The Andy Warhol Museum.

proposition (say, a long film about a man sleeping) and a scarcity of information (few of those who'd had a chance to see the film in the 1960s actually watched it) were two components of it. Accounts of Warhol's *Sleep* from the 1980s are accordingly diverse: its length swells to 10 hours in some references, or contracts to one in others.³

The stoic and the sensational are the twin poles of Warhol's aesthetic, and both have always had a presence in the reception of his films. But while reception of the Factory films divided into several camps (the mainstream emphasized their decadence; the avant-garde, their structural aesthetics), a growing queer film scene remembered the way that Warhol's erotics and aesthetics interacted. The subsequent decades saw several highprofile film retrospectives, including *The Films of Andy Warhol Part I* and *Part II* (in 1988 and 1994, respectively) and a series of gallery installations organized by Mary Lea Bandy of the Museum of Modern Art. It was only with

the reemergence of Warhol's films — concurrent with the rise of academic queer studies — that the rest of the world caught on. Though Warhol's fans had always known he was gay, art-historical discourse had not incorporated the idea of a 'queer sensibility' into readings of Warhol's work until after his death. Arguably, it was the films that brought Andy out of the closet definitively.

- 1 Paul Arthur, "Structural Film: Revisions, New Versions, and the Artifact," *Millennium Film Journal* 1 (Spring-Summer 1978), p. 5. Emphasis mine.
- **2** Glenn Collins, "Film: Where the Action Was," New York Times (24 April 1988).
- **3** And many claim that the heavily-edited film comprises a single shot (forgetting that the necessity of reel changes makes a six-hour shot impossible; even Empire comprises several 45-minute shots).



Andy Warhol, Blow Job (1964), film still.

Warhol scholars tend to blame Paul Morrissey for the temporary disappearance of the Factory film archive. Morrissey — generally considered the bad conscience of Warhol filmdom — embraced Andy's commercial drive while discarding his aesthetics. By 1972, the young director had taken over Factory film production and persuaded Warhol to shelve his earlier films. "Morrissey thought they were pretentious and boring," Douglas Crimp recalled in 2008, "and I think he wanted the attention for his own films."4 This arrangement may have been beneficial for Warhol, too: some claim that Warhol believed his films would increase in value if they were scarce.5 Making films, moreover, had involved Obitrol-laced all-nighters with unbalanced people, a prospect that likely seemed less attractive to Warhol after Valerie Solanas shot him in 1968. Warhol lent his name to Morrissey in order to promote (and profit from) films like Flesh for Frankenstein (1973) and Blood for Dracula (1974), ending with Andy Warhol's Bad, made in 1977.

In the subsequent decade, these films remained much more available than Warhol's earlier work; much of the film-going public thought of a 'Warhol Movie' as commercial sexploitation. When a *Los Angeles Times* critic quoted Warhol's business manager stating that "all

of Warhol's films have made money," it's unlikely that readers were in on the joke.⁶ By 1978, journalists in the mainstream press discussed the Warhol/Morrissey films in terms of the dissolute lifestyles they depicted. Without discussing sexuality explicitly, a reviewer claimed Warhol's cinema appealed to the "lowest" elements of society, and that it was "so vicious as to make it anathema to anyone of normal sensibilities." Intrigued readers could certainly read between the lines.

By 1978, Warhol's early films had gained their own, much more limited, notoriety. They became signal texts for the British Structural-Materialist filmmakers, and their reception in the UK was strongly mediated by the presence of critic and filmmaker Peter Gidal.⁸ By the 1980s, Gidal had developed and spread an argument for Warhol's radicalism, one that proposed Warhol as countervailing force to the dominant Hollywood style that the Althusserian-Marxist critics of *Screen* sought to undermine. Warhol's films, Gidal argues, raise "the question of a filmtime which *contradicts* in its machinations that of dominant cinema," replacing the time of narration with time's "concrete material passage." Like the ideal Structural-Materialist film, a Warhol *Screen Test* does not reproduce "a series of meanings," but enacts

"a procedure inseparable from the mode and process of film and camera."10

Many critics who drew from Gidal's descriptions of Warhol misunderstood one key element of the films' duration: the fact that all of the Warhol's silent films were projected in slow motion (at the silent speed of 16 frames per second). These assumptions likely came from Le Grice's argument that Warhol's innovation was the "representational equivalence in duration." 11 Critics repeatedly mention Warhol's "one-to-one" shooting/ projection ratio, neglecting the fact that the radio was in fact almost one to one-and-a-half: they were the first films that ever took longer to watch than to produce. Rees cites Couch, Kiss, and ("most notoriously") Empire as deriving from the one-to-one relationship, when all were silent works intended to be projected in slow motion.¹² In his discussion of the UK structural filmmakers, Arthur too suggests that Empire's scale "is more or less coincident with a continuous internal duration... its depicted time was roughly consistent with its viewers' clock time."13

Moreover, many viewers who'd read descriptions of Blow Job without seeing it may have been more capable of focusing on its slowness when not forced into a darkened space with its eroticism. A.L. Rees acknowledged that "a taste for Warhol" in 1980s London came automatically "with a dearth of his work." 14 Thus, many second-hand accounts of Warhol's films emphasize those elements that, in Paul Arthur's words, are open to paraphrase: namely, the length and fixity of each shot. Other formal elements, such as the dramatic key lighting, the high-contrast photography, the use of slow motion in the silent films, enter rarely into these secondhand discussions.

Yet the Structural-Materialist filmmakers were careful to distance themselves from the Warhol of Bad and Flesh. Even the early Warhol's drugged-out, sexually subversive content took a distant second place, in Gidal's mind, to his radical form. "Chelsea Girls had its effects in England via a different history and a different political base," wrote Gidal in 1981, arguing that Warhol had delivered Brechtian, Marxist aesthetics back to Europe in fresh form. British experimental film bore "the influence of Warhol's aesthetics, and the politics of those aesthetics, rather than the Camp and at times decadent subjectmatter." A far cry from the spectacle that the Factory had become known for in the United States, Gidal claimed that a Warholian aesthetic was apparent in the "Kyotorock garden-like quietness" of Guy Sherwin's movies. 15

In the United States, things were different. "Structural filmmaking is finished," wrote Mitch Tuchmann in Film Comment in 1978.16 Noel Carroll corroborated this point in a 1981 article in Millennium: "The period in which Structural Film (as distinct from Structuralist-Materialist Film) dominated the America avant-garde scene appears past."17 Younger filmmakers like Vivian Dick and Scott and Beth B were pursing a different aesthetic, based in the punk and no-wave scene. For some of these directors, most prominently Eric Mitchell, the banality and decadence of Warhol's content were as important as his fixed camera positions. Mitchell's Kidnapped (1978) and Underground USA (1980) both took Warhol's sound films, like Vinyl, as explicit reference. "The avant-garde that I am interested in seeing I wouldn't call avant-garde," he argued in 1980, "I would call it underground. I have no familiarity with the structuralist filmmakers. I think Warhol is a structuralist, but not in the same way as the others."18 Gidal had

- **4** Mathias Danbolt, "Front Room Back Room: An Interview with Douglas Crimp," Trickster 2 (2008), http://www.trikster.net/2/crimp/1.html (accessed 30 May 2013).
- 5 LA times review. Tony Rayns observed that Warhol "seemed content (resigned?) to let Morrissey... hijack Factory filmmaking for his own ends." Tony Rayns, "Death at Work: Evolution and Entropy in Factory Films," Andy Warhol Film Factory, ed. Michael O'Pray (London: British Film Institute, 1989): 162.
- 6 Barbara Isenberg, "Andy Warhol Busy Being... Andy Warhol," Los Angeles Times, 24 Feburary 1977, p. F1.
- 7 RH Gardner, "Actually, Warhol's 'Bad' is the Worst," The Sun, 23 September 1977, B1
- 8 A.L. Rees, "Warhol Waves: Andy Warhol and the British Avant-Garde," Andy Warhol Film Factory, ed. Michael O'Pray, p. 130; see also David Curtis, "Chronology of the British Avant-Garde," Studio International (1975).
- 9 Peter Gidal, "The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women and Kitchen," Undercut 1 (March-April 1981), reprinted in Andy Warhol: Film Factory, p. 118.
- 10 Ibid., p. 121.
- 11 Cited in Rees, p. 127.
- 12 Rees, p. 127.
- 13 Arthur, p. 6.
- 14 A.L. Rees, "Warhol Waves: Andy Warhol and the British Avant-Garde," Andy Warhol Film Factory, ed. Michael O'Pray, p. 124.
- 15 Peter Gidal, "British Avant-Garde Film," MFJ 13 (Fall-Winter 1983-1984): p. 14.
- 16 Mitch Tuchman, "The Mekas Brothers, Brakhage and Baillie Traveling Circus," Film Comment 14 (March/April 1978), p. 16.
- 17 Noel Carroll, "Interview with a Woman Who..." MFJ 7-9 (Fall/Winter 1980-1981), p. 37.
- 18 William Boddy, "New York City Confidential: An Interview with Eric Mitchell," MFJ 7-9 (Fall/Winter 1980-81), p. 35.

criticized these "New Talkies," calling them "a gloss of technical playing-around which could be called Capitalist Formalism... a sort of 'underground' of basic Hollywood hegemony (with the same desires, and contents)." Ironically, this criticism describes the very aspects of Warhol's work that Gidal had ignored: the 'star system' of the factory: the perversely rationalized production process of the Factory.

Few published writings around 1978 critically engaged the explicit *queerness* of the content of Warhol's

- 19 Peter Gidal, "British Avant-Garde Film," *MFJ* 13 (Fall-Winter 1983-1984): p. 12.
- **20** For example, he New York-based gay history group Altermedia hosted a screening of Warhol's Vinyl with Ondine in attendance at Club 57 in June of 1982. Bob Nelson, "Reconstructing Lesbian and Gay History," Gay Community News 9 (5 June 1982), p. 7.
- 21 Jerry Tartaglia, "The Gay Sensibility in American Avant-Garde Film," *MFJ* 4/5 (Summer/Fall 1979), pp. 53-58.
- 22 Ibid, 53.
- 23 Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, Popism: The Warhol Sixties (New York: Harcourt, 1980), p. 15.
- 24 The Advocate and other publications criticized the exhibit for emphasizing Andy's Catholic upbringing (!) more than his "gay sensibility." Robin Hardy, "Andy Warhol goes straight," The Advocate (December 5, 1989): pp. 58-60.
- 25 Simon Watney, "The Warhol Effect," The Work of Andy Warhol, ed. Gary Garrels (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989). Cited in Douglas Crimp, "Getting the Warhol We Deserve," Invisible Culture 1 (1999), http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue1/crimp/(accessed 1 June 2013).
- **26** Michael O'Pray, Introduction, Andy Warhol Film Factory, p. i.
- 27 Gary Indiana, "I'll Be Your Mirror," Village Voice (5 May 1987); reprinted in Andy Warhol: Film Factory, ed. Michael O'Pray (London: British Film Institute, 1989): pp. 182-185.
- 28 Mathias Danbolt, "Front Room Back Room: An Interview with Douglas Crimp," *Trickster* 2 (2008), http://www.trikster.net/2/crimp/1.html (accessed 30 May 2013).
- 29 Paul Taylor, "Andy Warhol's Final Interview," Flash Art (April 1987). Transcribed and republished by Warhol Stars at http://www.warholstars.org/warhol/warhol1/warhol1n/last.html (accessed 30 May 2013).
- 30 Collins.
- **31** Fred Camper, "The Lover's Gaze," The Chicago Reader (28 April 2000).

films, or acknowledged that the unblinking gaze of his camera might offer a queer aesthetic. Warhol was clearly a figure of importance to the gay community: of the few public venues that exhibited the rare available prints of Warhol's work, most were queer film festivals.²⁰ Yet one author in Millennium anticipated, in 1979, aspects of Warhol films that other scholars would only start to attend to in the 1990s. Jerry Tartaglia's "The Gay Sensibility in American Avant-Garde Film" proposed that mainstream film discourse had failed to recognize the "gay sensibility" of openly gay filmmakers. Tartaglia's work is incredibly prescient — issues like the construction of masculinity and 'genderfuck' would only enter academic discourse in subsequent decades. He also recognized Warhol as central to the definition of the queer aesthetic. His brief discussion of Blow Job manages to argue that Warhol's form and content, far from being separable, in fact offers an "unwavering nonjudgemental perspective on the homoerotic," that it "shows only guilt-free pleasure."21 While the world of avant-garde film had been a queerfriendly environment in the 1960s, the discourse on avantgarde film tended, as Tartaglia points out in his article, to elide queer issues by incorporating them into discussions of "universal rights." Mekas's defense of Flaming Creatures is a prime example of this well-meaning misstep.²² Both the US and UK versions of Structural Film — with their hetero-male heroes and emphasis on form — may have buried the issue of queer aesthetics even deeper, but the late 1970s, as the previous discussion shows, were a time in which filmmakers and critics started to re-think Warhol's ethics and aesthetics. Perhaps it is no accident that Warhol himself became more insistent on his gayness around 1980, when he released Popism: there, he admitted he'd done little to hide his sexuality, proudly playing up his "swish" side.²³ The world had become a bit more welcoming than it had been in the late 1950s, when gay but closeted artists like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg had slighted Warhol because he couldn't pass as straight.

After the artist's death in 1987, conflicts over Warhol's sexuality would become more explicit — and the institutions that dictated Warhol's legacy were content to allow the artist's work to pass as straight for anyone who remained unable to see the gayness in a wall of candycolored Liz Taylors. The posthumous 1989 Museum of Modern Art retrospective, curated by Kynaston McShine, was silent on the issue of Warhol's sexuality. A scandalized Robin Hardy, writing in *The Advocate*, protested that the exhibition text emphasized Warhol's *Catholicism*, of all things, but failed to even *mention* the artist's sexuality. A related panel discussion on Warhol sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation featured only one paper, by Simon Watney, that suggested that Warhol fell outside the model of the heroic male artist. ²⁵



Andy Warhol, Sleep (1963), film still.

There was another aspect of Warhol's work that the MoMA retrospective had failed to mention: his films. In his 1988 edited collection on the Factory films, Michael O'Pray complained that the MoMA catalog "barely mentioned" the Warhol's movies — an unforgivable sin for cinephiles who knew how deeply his work had marked the history of experimental film. ²⁶ In a 1987 obituary of Warhol, Gary Indiana argued that Warhol's films were the clearest evidence of his deviance, and suggested that the artist had taken them out of circulation when he started his stint as a member of the world of high fashion in the 1970s. "A certain crust of the haute monde might have been less welcoming to Andy if it had been exposed to his movies." MoMA's visitors may have been less likely to embrace the artist, too.

But a moment for Warhol's films was imminent: John Hanhardt, then curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, had persuaded the artist shortly before his death to agree to a film retrospective.²⁸ In his last interview, Warhol claimed a lack of excitement about showing his movies: "They're better talked about than seen," he said.²⁹ He died weeks later, in February of 1987; in April of 1988, the Whitney mounted *The Films of Andy Warhol: An Introduction*, which was advertised as "a selection of 16 of the more than 60 movies Warhol filmed between 1963 and 1968." Even here, rumor misled: Warhol's films actually number in the hundreds.

The re-release of the films — the actual films themselves — was revelatory for many critics. Even the rumor mill had omitted certain sensational details. "When I finally saw *Sleep*," Fred Camper observed, "the first thing I noticed was something that few accounts of the film had prepared me for: the sleeper is nude." The sleeper, John Giorno, was also briefly Warhol's lover. The aporia in mainstream Warhol discourse suddenly became apparent: "Imagine that Warhol was heterosexual," Camper proposed. "Would the film's commentators have omitted the fact that the sleeper was his girlfriend--and that she was nude?" Thus, once the ultimate conceptual film, *Sleep* became erotic — a gay artist's love letter.

Put face to face with the young subject of *Blow Job* (or face to rear with *Taylor Mead's Ass*), critics were forced to forge a connection between Warhol's fixed-camera aesthetics and his sexuality — a connection they have been grappling with ever since.

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EXPERIMENTAL **TANGO**

PAVLE LEVI

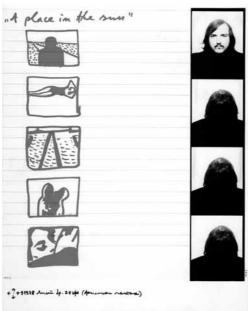
In 1983, experimental filmmaker Miodrag Milošević made a 20-minute film by appropriating parts of Bernardo Bertolucci's feature-length (129-minute release cut) Last Tango in Paris (1972). Unlike the art-house original, shot in vivid color and widescreen by Vittorio Storaro, Milošević's own Last Tango in Paris is a grainy, 16mm black and white film. The Yugoslav author succinctly explained what motivated his condensation of Bertolucci's decadent psycho-sexual drama: "This is my attempt at analyzing a favorite film. ... I saw it many times in theaters, before the appearance of video. Once, when I noticed that the film will be broadcast on television, I took a camera and shot a few scenes for myself off the screen. As soon as I began to shoot, I realized that what I saw in those images was something other than Bertolucci's own compositions. So, I began to do my own framing, to extrapolate what interested me the most in Bertolucci's shots. Since the footage is black and white, it acquired a whole new dimension. It is still a Bertolucci film, but cleansed of everything I did not like about it. ...It is not exactly a readymade, but a work that uses and manipulates some pre-existing material."1

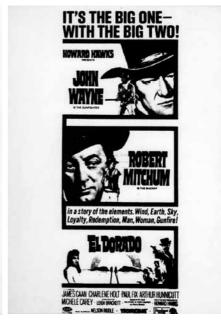
To be precise, the finished film is the result of a dual shooting process: first, Milošević used 8mm film stock to shoot images off the television screen; then, while projecting this footage, he filmed it again with a 16mm camera. The re-framing of Bertolucci's images took place during both stages. This manner of execution also caused the new version's distinct graininess. Additionally, Milošević entirely eliminated the film's original sound

track. Instead, he used as the musical background a portion of Jim Morrison's epic rock song, "An American Prayer" (released posthumously, in 1978).

There are (at least) two ways to watch and experience Milošević's experimental Tango: having already seen Bertolucci's film, and without having seen it. Milošević's editing is consistently disjunctive and abrupt. The discontinuities it creates readily call attention to the founding gesture of filmmaking-by-appropriation. Thus, if one had not already seen the original (and perhaps even without being aware of its existence, for it is only in the end credits that Milošević names his visual and sound sources), the abbreviated version comes across as a film systematically built around gaps, omissions, and sutures in the visual track. Something continually lurks beyond the edges of the frame, in the absent field of Milošević's work — for an uninformed viewer, Bertolucci's Last Tango in Paris represents an invisible piece of cinema: never unveiled in its entirety, yet unmistakably inferred through persistent structural ellipses.

On the other hand, for those who know Bertolucci's film, Milošević's experiment — its sovereign beauty not withstanding - provides the material base for an exercise in imaginary cinema: an elaborate "fill-in-theblanks" stimulating the spectator's desire to relate it to the original, to recall the arsenal of missing images from the "Bertolucci archive," and to reconstitute, from the snippets of information retained by Milošević, the already told, already concluded, 1972 Ur-narrative.





Psychoanalysis (which, let us note in passing, played an important role in Bertolucci's life) might have put it thus: the 1972 film is what is in the 1983 film "more than itself."2 Both real and virtual, invisible and imaginary, Bertolucci's Last Tango "exists as lost," and is "lost as it comes to existence" in Milošević's radical exercise in blatant (illegitimate?) appropriation. Selectively filming off the television screen parts of a commercially distributed mainstream work, is certainly not a strategy frequently engaged to publically state one's passionate admiration for another filmmaker's achievements. Watching a film (repeatedly, obsessively) just does not seem to suffice here any longer. To venerate a film is now to re-produce it (twice) and directly cut into it! In this respect, a rare cousin of Milošević's Tango is Joseph Cornell's Rose Hobart (1936), which — in a similarly fetishizing gesture (in this case, however, without re-filming the original) - appropriated and intervened into the 1931 jungle melodrama East of Borneo, reducing it in the process from 77 to 20 minutes in length.3

More commonly, such dynamic of creative condensation to an essential form, expressive of a perverse declaration of love, is encountered in various extra-filmic outlets of cinephilia such as star-albums and fanzines. These burst with iconic images of all sorts, whether original, for instance drawn, as in Slobodan Šijan's A Place in the Sun, or appropriated, as in the same cineaste's Ride, Boldly Ride. On account of the latter, Šijan wrote: "This advertisement for the film El Dorado, manages to illustrate the very essence of Hawks's invisible directorial style in

a fascinating way... it suggests more about the kernel of what we are going to experience, than many pages of textual analysis." Still another interesting modality of the same general dynamic is at work in that peculiar mode of cinematic production — at times itself conceived in truly

> Slobodan Šijan, LEFT A Place in the Sun, RIGHT Ride, Boldly Ride. Issues 28 and 20 of the filmmaker's fanzine, Film Leaflet, 1978.

¹ Quoted from Miroslav Bata Petrović, Alternativni film u Beogradu od 1950. do 1990. godine (Belgrade: Dom kulture Studentski grad, 2008), p. 173.

² See Jacques Lacan, "In you more than you," The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), pp. 263-276.

³ This is not to overlook the fact that Tango also exhibits clear affinity with certain currents of structural filmmaking (Ken Jacobs's Tom, Tom the Piper's Son, in particular). A discussions of Milošević's work along those lines may be found in: Branislav Miltojević, "Bardovi: Izmedju stare i nove avangarde," Celuloidni zaloggii Bojang Jovanovića (Belgrade: Dom kulture Studentski grad, 2008), pp.135-137. See also Zoran Saveski, Avangarda, alternativa, film (Belgrade: Dom kulture Studentski grad, 2006), pp. 143-144.



Ivan Martinac, Stradanje Ivane Orleanske (1980), detail of a photo-book.

experimental fashion — given to preserving memorable films as photo-books (typically, each static shot in a given film would be represented by, reduced to, a single frame).4

In the Yugoslav context, it was Ivan Martinac, a major figure of experimental filmmaking since the 1960s, who better than anyone else understood the significance and the beauty of the photo-book as a cinematic form in its own right. In 1980, only a few years before Milošević would aim his camera at Bertolucci's film, Martinac meticulously crafted a detailed print version — imaginative and analytical at the same time - of a cherished silent classic, Carl Theodore Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928). "Passing for a didactic re-construction of Dreyer's 'shooting script," wrote film critic Ranko Munitić at the time, this "most extraordinary of books" is "in fact a deeply personal and constructive gesture... an interdisciplinary project that unites text, image, and overall design into what is, in this region, the first real accomplishment in the realm of 'close film analysis.'"5

Significantly, by presenting Dreyer's film in the format of a photo-book, Martinac was applying the same rules of editing he had steadily been practicing, theorizing, and promoting in the arena of filmmaking proper. In 1990, he summarized his position thus: "It is natural to say that films are made 'from frames' (photograms),

for the outcome of montage is - a certain number of photograms, those minimal spatial and temporal units of any given shot." Furthermore, "one should always remember that a huge amount of film resides in its splices, the links between consecutive shots that are invisible during the projection. There is more kinesthetic charge in splices, than there is in shots themselves. Shots on either side of the splice may as well be still photographs."6 In this light, a photo-book such as The Passion of Joan of Arc, which carefully monitors the manner in which Dreyer's work unfolds (its spatio-temporal rhythms, camera angles and movements, shot transitions, etc.), is perhaps best understood as a particularly sophisticated result of that remarkable procedure which Martinac believed ought to be performed upon every film: the tracing of its "cardiogram."

Martinac's appearance of cross-media transcription of a film close to his heart inspired other filmmakers to conduct further experiments in this field. In 1982, Miroslav Bata Petrović intervened into Martinac's own intervention, so to speak. By filming the latter's book, Petrović attempted to re-animate its individual frames as actual shots. He literally added duration, the felt passage of time, to Martinac's series of stills (while respecting the original length ratio of Dreyer's film shots) and thereby,





Miroslav Bata Petrović, Stradanje Jovanke Orleanke (1982), frame enlargements.

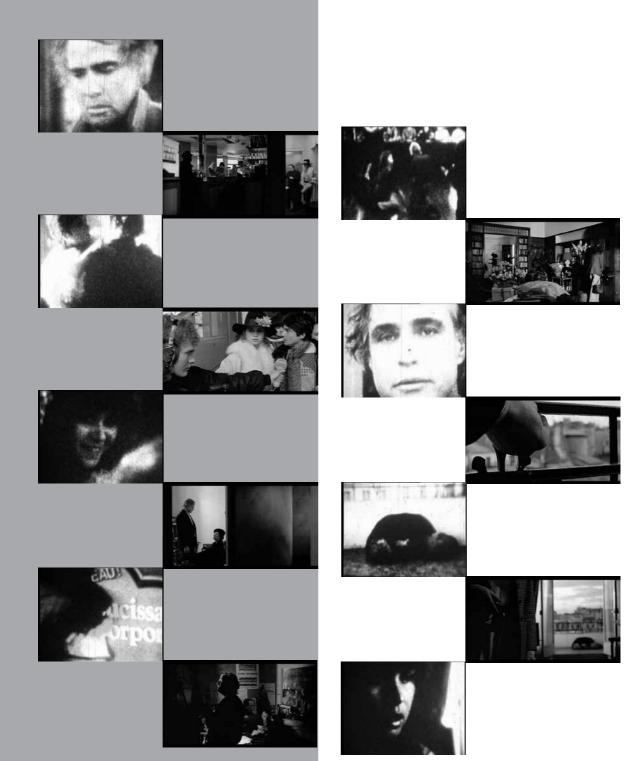
once again, turned Joan of Arc into a moving image. Properly speaking, however, Petrović's The Passion of Joan of Arc — an exploration of what is lost and what is gained in the slippage between different media, between a film and a book, moving and static images — is itself a peculiar, "in-between" piece of cinema. It operates in the absent field generated by Martinac's transformation of Dreyer's work. It is no less a film than the 1928 version, but also no more a film than the photo-book of the original. Perhaps this is why Petrović, an avid proponent of "pure film," decided to end his exercise by burning at the stake Joan of Arc that is the book he had filmed!

Petrović's capture, in 1982, of a double movement of Dreyer's work — from film to photo-book and back - corresponds to Milošević's own capture, the following year, of a double movement of Bertolucci's work — from film to television and back. However, for Petrović the encounter between the film and the photo-book gives rise to a "conflict of ambivalence," and ends in violence intended to (re-)assert the primacy of the former. Milošević, on the other hand, allows television (the TV monitor) to be thoroughly subsumed under the cinematic experience. The raster and the flicker of the television screen are here utilized as contributing factors in the process of amplifying and foregrounding the graininess of the film image. ⁷ But while the grain may effectively bespeak the material kernel of film as such, the initial object of Milošević's love, Bertolucci's Tango, ultimately evades the force of condensation unleashed by the Yugoslav author. No wonder, then, that in 2012 he made an even shorter, 6-minute version of Tango, thereby further intensifying his pursuit of its alluring essence. "I often felt," the filmmaker declared, "that the 20-minute original was too long!"

In lieu of a conclusion, what follows (next page) is a model for an inclusive photo-book of The Last Tango in Paris: a fragment of a possible "cardiogram" that would explicitly register the tight embrace between Milošević's and Bertolucci's films. A sequence of frames taken from the 6-minute experimental version is here complemented by a sequence of frames "recovered" from those parts of Bertolucci's film that had been omitted due to Milošević's impassioned manner of shooting.

- 4 Needless to say, with the advent of video technology in the late 1970s, the format of film-book was gradually pushed aside and eventually became all but non-existent. However, video also gave rise to some new practices, such as vidding: fans creating new versions of the original work by selectively using and re-arranging parts of it.
- 5 Quoted from: Martinac: 41 godina filmskog stvaralaštva, ed. Ivan Martinac (Split, Zagreb: Otvoreno pučko učilište Split & Hrvatski filmski savez, 2001), pp.82-83.
- 6 Ibid., pp.95-96.

7 In Milošević's own words, his film sought to posit "an aesthetic of semantic noise as the aesthetic of the medium itself." Miodrag Milošević, "From Film to Video," Video umetnost u Srbiji, ed. Dejan Sretenović (Belgrade: Center for Contemporary Arts, 1999), p.130.



THE END

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ABIGAIL CHILD

HENRY HILLS

TURN TOWARDS THE CONCRETE





JUAN CARLOS KASE

From the perspective of contemporary, post-Giuliani Manhattan, the past lives of the city's filmic avant-garde seem to have unfolded in grungy, unruly, and ragged surroundings. When watching such varied and iconic New York films as The Flower Thief (Ron Rice, 1960), Zorn's Lemma (Hollis Frampton, 1970), or Lost, Lost, Lost (Jonas Mekas, 1976), a boisterous city peers back at the viewer, jutting through the works' artistic matrices and revealing itself as a harsh, rough hewn secondary author. Despite their diverse artistic and ideological emphases, all of the city's experimental filmmakers have forged some kind of relationship with his or her social, historical, and material surroundings: Every New York film says something different about the city and its history. Specific to the concerns here, avant-garde cinema, as an independent, largely self-funded, subcultural tradition has been particularly attuned to the economic and material contexts of its own practice.

At the cusp of the Reagan years, in the wakes of feminism and structuralism, and at the crossroads of Downtown's vibrant scenes of improvised music, experimental poetry, avant-garde dance, and independent cinema, a new filmic trajectory took form. Centered around film and performance venues such as the Collective for Living Cinema, Roulette, and the Millennium Film Workshop, the burgeoning intermedial energies of avant-garde cinema in the early 1980s devised fresh modes of interaction between artistic traditions, political imperatives, and social contexts that were specific to the moment at hand. In an era of urban decay, public violence, rampant homelessness, and public health catastrophes living in New York then was even affordable! — a collection of young film artists enthusiastically reconfigured the ways in which experimental cinema could engage with its surroundings by pursuing inventive approaches that interrogated established modes of authorship, artistic construction, and ideology. Abigail Child and Henry

> ABOVE Henry Hills, Money (1985), conducting live re-enactment at Roulette Intermedium. Photo: Lona Foote.

OPPOSITE Abigail Child, Is This What You Were Born For?: Mutiny (1986), frame enlargement. All images courtesy the artists.





Abigail Child, Is This What You Were Born For?: Mutiny (1986), frame enlargements.



Hills, two of the most inventive avant-garde filmmakers of the era, engaged with and interrogated the cultural horizon of the 1980s and the possibilities that experimental cinema offered for its exploration. With Is This What You Were Born For?: Mutiny (Child, 1986) and Money (Hills, 1985), this pair of film artists devised unique but related articulations of film form, ideology, and intermedial experiment that openly displayed the concrete substrate of the city's sidewalks, buildings, and parking lots, as well as the concrete textures, sounds, and materials of the film medium.

PLACE:

In 1978, following a shared romantic history in the Bay Area, where they made films and together co-edited the newsletter Canyon Cinemanews, Child and Hills moved to New York. By this point, both were experienced filmmakers: Before moving to the West Coast, Child had previously worked for a number of years as a documentarian in New York, making ethnographic films for both commercial and public television. There, in the early-tomid 1970s, she honed her crafts as a filmmaker and editor, and began to develop the philosophical interests in the politics of representation that would powerfully determine the direction of her later work. Shortly thereafter, in San Francisco, she began to develop her voice as an experimental filmmaker. In the same bohemian enclave, Hills studied cinema at the San Francisco Art Institute under the tutelage of James Broughton, George Kuchar, and perhaps most influentially, Hollis Frampton. Once in New York, the two filmmakers immersed themselves in the subcultures and social networks of the avantgarde, particularly, those associated with performance, improvised music, dance, and poetry.

By the time that she made Mutiny Child was an established poet. Hills too interacted with the literary world, including the New York L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, such as Charles Bernstein and Jack Collom. Both filmmakers learned from and contributed to the work of Downtown musicians and dancers as well, including John Zorn and Sally Silvers respectively, both of who would prove to be regular collaborators in their films. Within this artistic atmosphere, Child and Hills pioneered a fresh filmmaking sensibility that evoked the intermediality and collaborative spirit of the 1960s, by showcasing an array of performers from the worlds of improvised music, experimental poetry, and avant-garde dance. In a seemingly paradoxical combination, their work blended this collectively constructed, documentary display of avant-garde subcultures with the severe systematicity of 1970s' 'structural' film by embracing incredibly complex sound/image relationships, extreme formal rigor, and an almost hyperbolic embrace of montage and citation. Within this multifarious historical and formal mélange,

they embedded a through line of socio-historical reference that spoke directly to the conditions of Ronald Reagan's America and Edward Koch's New York. Ultimately, these diverse intermedial influences, formal architectures, and ideological allusions coalesced into a post-Cagean field of play that, in Mutiny and Money, suggest fresh conditions of possibility for experimental cinema while addressing the specificities of urban experience in the 1980s.

A MUTINY OF FORMS AND VOICES

Child's early epic, Is This What You Were Born For?, is a seven part work, made over the course of nine years, that experiments with an array of sound/image relationships. In a manner that echoes the formal severity of Hollis Frampton's Critical Mass (1971) or Michael Snow's Rameau's Nephew (1974), each installation in this series explores a different facet of correspondence between the sonic and the visual components of cinema (including single track wild sound, single track sync sound, multitracked sync and wild sound, original music, found sound, voiceover, and silence). In its sources, Mutiny is a hybrid object. Throughout this film, Child incorporates a varied collage of outtakes from her earlier work as a television documentarian, including Between Times (1975) about teenage girls in suburban Minneapolis, Game (1972) filmed in downtown Manhattan and featuring the drama that evolves between a prostitute and her pimp, and Savage Streets (1973) a non-fiction study of gangs in the South Bronx. She also includes found footage from an extremely faded red print of a TV performance of an African American pop singer and her band, an aspect of the film that references pop culture kitsch. Lastly, Child documents three different performers: Sally Silvers dances in a corporate office space while wearing an enormous red sweater; Polly Bradford plays a raucous violin while standing in a parka on a Chinatown sidewalk; and Shelly Hirsch loudly incants an indiscernible song on a crowded street amidst the Sullivan Street Fair in Little Italy. Together these diverse non-fiction materials foreground women as both subjects of non-fiction cinema and objects of the camera's gaze.

In its combination of disparate materials from over a decade of Child's career, Mutiny is an experiment in cultural memory that leaps across social strata, geographic locales, and historical time periods. Throughout its parade of young women (and a few men) in action — jumping on trampolines, conversing, dancing, talking to the camera - it presents exceedingly heterogeneous footage, with a wide array of formal attributes, including diverse color palettes, film stocks, camera movements, compositional sensibilities, and sonic parameters, as well as a wide panoply of social reference, class associations, and racial markers. Child assembles this sprawling variety of footage into a breakneck montage that is as pulsatile and staccato



Henry Hills, Money (1985), frame enlargements.

as most of Paul Sharits' films. The sound is largely synchronous, however it is continuously interrupted by abrupt edits that create a battery of clipped words, stunted gasps, and mechanical bleeps.1

Child's method of construction produces a disjunctive flow of sound and image that careens so quickly, and is so fragmented, that almost no spoken phrases or physical gestures are completed. Nearly every action is truncated and every word clipped. This heavily edited, labor-intensive work openly celebrates its constructedness by continuously calling attention to itself as a text composed in the process of montage rather than through the events of photography. The result is a wild and ludic blend of ungainly and mottled visual materials that recalls the playful, critical cinemas of Bruce Conner and Arthur Lipsett. In its sonic component, Mutiny presents an auditory collage that Child describes as "a dissonant percussive musique concréte."2 Through her method of continuous truncation, Child divides spoken words into smaller units of non-signifying sound and moving images into brief spasms of fleeting photographic reference.

In his introduction to Child's book This Is Called Moving, scholar Tom Gunning argues that Child's cinema is a kind of return to the extreme formal diversity and experimentation of Soviet constructivism — he thus titles this tendency as neoconstructivism. To explain this formulation he suggests that in Child's films "images, sound, and words are all treated as plastic matter, open to rearrangement, liberated from pre-determined meanings."3 Gunning's description penetrates the conceptual goals of Child's work and suggests that she destabilizes meaning and undermines the socially inscribed processes of signification through a radical formal manipulation of the work's plastic parameters. The plasticity of Child's cinema is channeled through a socio-historical awareness, including a knowledge of the philosophical bearing of labor, the material contexts of urban topography, and the overdetermined functions of class, gender, and social difference.

In Mutiny, Child's cinema also presents a unique kind of pleasure that echoes the cacophony of New York City's soundscape, an approach that relates to the methods of intertexuality and citation that one finds in both hip hop and avant-garde classical music (e.g. John Cage's "Williams Mix" (1953)). Obviously this work would prove aggravating to the average viewer or listener whose expectations have been conditioned exclusively by Hollywood cinema. However, there is a level of elegance here, a kind of mechanical, collagic sublime that is finely honed and carefully orchestrated. Child's clarifies the intent: "I think my work shares in a musical, mental, and physical ecstasy, which has traditionally been seen as 'disorderly' and threatening to a static social realm." 4 It is precisely this disorder, this cacophony, this structural and linguistic distress that defines the peculiar pleasures that Mutiny produces.

LABOR, MONEY, MONTAGE

In its montage-based construction and machine gun tempo, Hills' Money clearly shares a set of aesthetic methods with Child's Mutiny. In many ways these two films speak to each other — both in the range of possible relationships that they explore within the interaction of sound and image and in the provocative ways that they suggest oblique social critique through formal experimentation. Like Mutiny, Money is an audio-visual assault with a rhythmic pulse akin to Peter Kubelka's Arnulf Rainer (1960). (According to Hills' estimate, his film features about five thousand cuts.) The filmmaker playfully suggests that the discomfort associated with this cinema of extreme montage is therapeutic: "Viewing experimental film should be like working-out: if your eyes



are sore afterwards you know they're getting stronger."5 Money is a battery of sound and image, but like Child's work, it is rigorously constructed and painstakingly assembled according to a detailed compositional score, that is intended to activate a particular range of references and associations.

Money is the more programmatic of the two films, because, though fragmentary, it is clearly about something specific.6 It begins with the phrase, "I don't have enough money," which is then followed by a cymbal crash, a mechanical blurt, a woman screaming, and the opening credits. Throughout the film we hear key words that create clear associations with the topic at hand, including "bureaucrat," "business man," and "working class." Less pointed and comical non-sequiturs percolate throughout the film as well, such as "If you're not getting enough in America, go to Russia," "As a whole, it's totally fucked," and "This is my street." Throughout the film its onscreen subjects laugh and smile, indicating quite clearly that, despite the seriousness of the topic, the film (with its distinctively collaborative tone) was conceived and realized in the spirit of play. However, the film maintains a hard rhetorical edge, something demonstrated visually through the urban decay that occupies many of its images. Hills explains his goals by writing that, "In the Reagan-era it [money] particularly weighs down our dreams. I wanted to address current concerns, however obliquely." This obliqueness — related to both irony and displacement — has a new critical valence that is particular to the era. In the 1980s, the earnest politics and critical languages of the 1960s and 70s no longer resonated with their previous force. The rhetorics of protest, opposition, and critique were changing.

In terms of the film's historical contingency, here too there is documentary reference. Rather than presenting an ethnographic study of a handful of subjects, Hills'

film incorporates a much larger number of performers, in a more encyclopedic format. It is clear that many of the performances — of Abigail Child reading poetry on the sidewalk (Hills also appears in Mutiny), Sally Silvers

- 1 Child produces these strange sonic blurts by stopping and starting a rented Auricon single-system, sound-on-film camera, triggering an uncanny sonic and visual jerk known as a strobe cut. Hills also employed this technique in Money, though it is most commonly associated with the later sound films of Andy Warhol, such as Nude Restaurant (1967) or Bike Boy (1967).
- 2 Child, This Is Called Moving: A Critical Poetics of Film (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005),
- 3 Tom Gunning in Preface to Child, This Is Called Moving, p. xi.
- 4 Scott MacDonald, A Critical Cinema 4 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 219.
- 5 Henry Hills, Making Money (New York City: Segue, 1986), p. 7.
- 6 This film bears some striking similarities to Roberta Friedman and Grahame Weinbren's Murray and Max Talk About Money (1979), an earlier montage-based experiment in the radical possibilities of sync sound collage and oblique ideological critique. Friedman and Weinbren produced their essayistic masterwork of political cinema in Los Angeles, before coming to New York at the cusp of the 1980s (as Child and Hills, also West Coast transplants) had done. Before Child and Hills, they collectively demonstrated fresh, post-Cagean possibilities for a socially engaged yet ludic cinema of radical form.
- 7 Henry Hills, Making Money, p. 10.

dancing in a parking lot, or Tom Cora playing cello on a bridge — were conceived specifically for the making of the film. The film also includes live performance footage, such as that of guitarist Derek Bailey in a club and an orchestral presentation by John Zorn's ensemble, which was clearly presented for an audience (and documented by Hills). With both kinds of material, Money presents a group snapshot, an all-star survey of the Downtown avant-garde in the early-to-mid 1980s. Of these two films, Money is more imbued with a documentary attention to, and awareness of, improvised music. According to Hills, the genesis of the film can be traced to a performance series titled "Last Tuesday" in which he curated collaborations between poets, jazz musicians, and filmmakers at Millennium Film Workshop circa 1980. A number of the performers from that series appear in Hills' film. In this regard, Money explores the particular historical texture of New York's avant-garde scene in the early 1980s.

In its musical sensibility, Hills' film reflects some of the core developments of the era's trends in jazz and free music. In the downtown improvised music scene of the early 1980s, there was a break away from the organicism of sixties free jazz and a move towards a more disjunctive, fragmentary, sutured kind of musical organization.8

- 8 This shift might be productively compared to the move from the dominant lyrical strand of experimental cinema in the 1960s towards a more systematic, conceptually rigid cinema in the 1970s.
- 9 Making Money, p. 9. A much earlier precedent for this kind of New York, all-star, avant-garde, intermedial experiment can be found in Karlheinz Stockhausen's 1964 performance of Originale, a large scale performance work that featured poet Allen Ginsberg, cellist Charlotte Moorman, pianist James Tenney, performance artist Nam June Paik, filmmaker Robert Breer, and director Allan Kaprow.
- 10 Hills suggests that a number of the era's artists exhibited a shared sensibility across different media forms: "I do like the idea of a 'collective poetics.' We were the same age at this particular intense locale and period and for the most part at a similar place in the development of our personal aesthetics Money is almost like a historical document now, but maybe it's my fiction of a lost glorious period of collective endeavor." "Henry Hills Interview," in Vlak, vol. 1, issue 1 (September 2010), pp. 255-256.
- 11 Child too demonstrates a pop culture consciousness, particularly in the systematic use of film noir tropes throughout Is This What You Were Born For? Perils (1986).

Composer/bandleaders such as John Zorn and George Lewis (both of whom appear in *Money*) experimented with approaches to orchestration and conduction that combined composition and improvisation in semi-structured, mixed forms, each of which demonstrated the marked influence of avant-garde classical music. The downtown jazz scene of the early 1980s manifested a post-Cagean blend of freedom and systematicity, accompanied by a sense of play and surprise. Zorn's "game pieces" of the late 1970s were some of the most important early experiments in this vein; in fact, Money contains fragments of landmark performances of his "Croquet" and "Track and Field." Hills suggests that Zorn's work "presents some obvious parallels to my own efforts. Here we have a document preserving historic samples of the work of a diverse grouping of artists displaying their unique tropes, but at every point the signature of the author is prominently evidenced."9 Most importantly, in Money, Hills' authorial signature is realized not in the camera work, the visual style, or the content, but in the assemblage of the film elements through an abrupt shock montage that creates a loud, staccato rhythm akin to the pounding mechanicity of a factory assembly line. 10

Throughout Money, there too is intertextual crosstalk. The majority of the soundtrack is synchronous, but as in Mutiny, there are occasional moments in which an action is accompanied by an onomatopoetic sound effect akin to what one might hear in a cartoon (a sound/ image matching known as "Mickey Mousing" in the film industry). Over the course of the film a sample of James Brown exclaiming "Hit me!," punctuates the largely cacophonous soundtrack, suggesting an awareness, or even an openness, to mass culture.11 This film exhibits a layered, kinetic texture of repetition and fragmentation that is related to the innovations in popular music during the early 1980s, at the dawn of hip-hop's influence. However, to situate this film in its historical context, perhaps the most important determining factor is the texture of the cityscape itself. Almost the entire film, with its thousands of audio-visual fragments, presents New York City's busy sidewalks, swarming streets, burned out parking lots, ramshackle construction sites, crowded bridges, and lively playgrounds as the sights of performance. Here, setting is an absolutely central part of Money's textual construction. Concrete, asphalt, crumbled buildings, and urban decay occupy the majority of the film's visual space. As such, despite its extreme fragmentation and audio-visual abstraction, the film communicates a tangible feeling for what this period looked and felt like. It is a Reagan era city symphony, describing urban dysfunction while celebrating the absurd, the playful, and the delirious possibilities of improvisation, performance, and social experimentation. This film is about New York as much as it is about money. But, like Mutiny, it is also about cinema.





Henry Hills, Money (1985), frame enlargements.



Abigail Child, Is This What You Were Born For?: Mutiny (1986), frame enlargement.

Mutiny and Money collectively instantiate Gunning's suggestion, cited above, that Child (and perhaps Hills) devised a new kind of cinema at the beginning of the 1980s, which could be described as neoconstructivist. Such work reconfigures the early 20th century desire to blend extreme formal plasticity — in all possible registers — with a hard-edged politics rooted in the dialectical comparison that is inherent in collage and montage. However, unlike the intense compositional control and prescriptive aesthetics of a constructivist filmmaker like Sergei Eisenstein, these filmmakers demonstrate an openness to chance, chaos, and contingency that is specific to both the documentarian's observational sensibility and a post-Cagean aesthetics. Child evocatively describes this openness to the city, its noises, and its sculptural possibilities when she says — in a perfect echo of Cage's language — as she explains that in working with urban spaces "the challenge is to be open in an uncontrollable environment."12 Many other films and filmmakers of this era blended an interest in city life, intermediality, and ideological critique within far-reaching formal experimentation. However, these two films can,

at least partially, convey the collective innovations in the period at hand due to their timeliness, their shared sensibility, and their historical specificity. In their blend of concrete reference, radical plasticity, and collaborative performance, Mutiny and Money demonstrate a comingto-terms with the menacing conditions of their historical surroundings, while pursuing an array of free gestures and utopian play that suggest other possibilities for art, life, and the breakdown of the boundaries between them.

12 Child, This Is Called Moving, p. 223.

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EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA AND THE CRYSTALS OF TIME: matthias müller's visual poems

ROY GRUNDMANN

Few artistic oeuvres exemplify the myriad facets of avant-garde filmmaking more comprehensively than the work of Matthias Müller.1 The reason, as critics and theorists of Müller's work have pointed out, is Müller's profound cinephilia.² At once facilitating and representing the return to a scene that has lastingly structured the ways we experience and relate to the world, the cinema, as it permeates Müller's films, shapes our subjecthoods between affect and intellect, across solitude and sociality. It is capable of articulating subjectivity between private and public, present and past, desire and memory. As is typical for the avant-garde, many of Müller's films are autobiographical. Whether he uses found footage or original material, whether he shares his work with festival audiences or gallery visitors, the artist makes films to express what has held central meaning in his own life. For Müller, this includes being raised in the prosperous yet stifling cold war climate of 1960s West-Germany, coming of age sexually in the post-Stonewall era, and becoming a filmmaker during the age of AIDS, when the universe of artistic possibilities that unfolded for him became instantly shaped by fear, uncertainty, and loss. These experiences are indelibly inscribed into Müller's films of the 1990s, which rank among the avant-garde's richest, most stunningly beautiful poems about memory and human affect. And Müller's post-millennial work, although marked by a shift to digital video and a move from film festivals to biennials and gallery spaces, constitutes an ongoing engagement with — and in many cases a formal troping of — loss, memory, melancholia, and the fragility and ephemerality of human experience.

Müller's education as a filmmaker is equal parts academic and auto-didactic. He received formal training from German experimental filmmaker and theorist

Birgit Hein at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Braunschweig, where he spent much of his time catching up on film history. But even before going to Braunschweig, Müller, together with his friend Christiane Heuwinkel and six other aspiring filmmakers, co-founded the Super 8 cooperative, Alte Kinder (Old Children), whose members repurposed their living quarters, many of which were located in public housing, as film studios (Schulte Strathaus; 2005, 12). As is well known, this mode of production was characteristic of American underground cinema, but it also defined the artistic approach of the queer German avant-garde of the late 1960s and early 70s. Some of its members, Rosa von Praunheim and Werner Schroeter, had become exposed to the work of Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, Ron Rice, and others at the historic 1967 film festival in Knokke-le-Zoute, Belgium. While this parallel offers but one entry for placing Müller into a tradition of queer German avant-garde filmmaking, it should be noted that while von Praunheim and Schroeter would soon turn to making feature-length films for television or commercial distribution, Müller to this day remains committed to the short film. For Müller's shorts Super 8 would remain a central source medium next to video, 16mm (his main exhibition medium in the 1990s), 35mm, and digital video (his main exhibition medium in the new millennium, even as his 16mm films continue to be distributed by Canyon Cinema).

Müller's fluid, synergistic use of these formats constitutes the creative richness of his oeuvre, and is central to his signature as a queer filmmaker. This is perhaps most impressively on display in Müller's first two major works, Aus der Ferne — The Memo Book (1989) and Home Stories (1990), each of which, after its respective release, became a cause celebre on the festival circuit. Using filmed



Matthias Müller, Aus der Ferne — The Memo Book (1989). All images frame enlargements, courtesy the artist.

letters, photographs, and footage from old Hollywood films taped off a television monitor — all of which Müller hand-processed and then blew up to 16mm — The Memo Book is a complexly structured, densely layered poem about the memories of a man who has died of AIDS, the memory of a love with all its subtending ambivalences and complexities. Müller is certainly not the first filmmaker to explore the affective nature of memory, nor is he the first to use subjective voice-over to retrieve an absent history (Schulte-Strathaus 2005; 17). But his project is given shape through the artist's articulation of what Roger Hallas has identified as a specifically gay cinephilia (Hallas; 2004, 86). Underscoring its gay theme is the film's fragile, ephemeral form, itself highly evocative of the experience of loss that was becoming so central for many gay men during the period. This emphasis on the precarious materiality of the medium enables Müller to create a striking metaphor: film as body (Hallas; 2004, 105).

For Home Stories, Müller slyly compiled similarly structured scenes from Hollywood Technicolor melodramas of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s that feature agitated heroines in their luxurious domestic settings, as they toss and turn in bed, anxiously gaze out windows, or rush up to doors.

> 1 My fascination with Matthias Müller's work goes back to the conference "Matthias Müller: Multimedia Poet," that I organized at Boston University in collaboration with the Goethe Institut, Boston, in September 2006, I would like to thank Matthias Müller for his contributions to this conference and his invaluable comments and clarifications about his work. I would also like to thank Janet Harbord at Queen Mary University, London, for giving me the opportunity to present a paper on Müller's films in November 2011, from which this article draws.

2 For a useful overview over Müller's work, see Stefanie Schulte Strathaus's introduction, "All That Heaven Allows" to her edited volume, The Memo Book: Films, Videos and Installations by Matthias Müller (Berlin: Verlag Vorwerk 8, 2005), pp. 60-41. For a theoretical introduction specifically to Müller's found footage works, see Blümlinger (2005).







Foregrounding the latent nostalgia of color-saturated Hollywood films by tearing moments of sensuousness, spectacle, and excess from their narratives, Müller demonstrates how queers have used popular cinema to resist heteronormative ideology even as they articulate a sense of gayness close to loss, due to the "unattainability of a real self" (Hallas; 2004; 88). Regarding the dynamics of gay spectatorship, Home Stories is thus no mere deconstruction of Hollywood's representation of female heroines — "it is also a film about how we watch Hollywood films" (Siegel and Hendrickson; 2005; 215).

Like The Memo Book, which it resembles to a degree, Sleepy Haven (1993) can be read as a film that metaphorizes the permeable, precarious human body. In this film, Müller combines archival images of ships and ports with his own footage of lithe, unclad sailors, male genitals, silhouettes of men kissing, billowing curtains, and book pages. He recycles from The Memo Book images of a set of hands trying to tear open a male chest, and adds footage of a TV set (we see a foot in front of it) that shows a tightrope walker crossing a large waterfall. The lyrical iconography of sailors and ships does, of course, belong to a specific gay mythology inspired by Jean Genet. In Genet's universe, gay subjectivity is positioned between self-creation and self-annihilation, which is why, during the 1980s and early 90s, Genet's system of icons and metaphors resonated in gay art and film, as well as in queer theory.3 Müller does not reference Genet's trifecta of metaphors of homosexuality, murder, and sailors and the sea in their original, tightly conceived interdependency - though the at times ominous music and the motif of the hands trying to open the male chest do evoke the possibility of violent death and homosexuality's proximity to it. More importantly, the film's fluid, lyrical visuals of water, ships, and male homoeroticism suggest that the medium of film has the capacity to match the protean metaphorizing power of the written word.

Judging from his theorization of the cinema in terms of the time image and the movement image, one assumes that Gilles Deleuze would have concurred with this suggestion. And it comes as no surprise that Deleuze accorded a special role to the ship (Deleuze; 1989, 68-97), identifying it as an apposite idiom by which to explain the crystalline structure of certain images, which he calls crystal images.4 He argues that the ship's divided structure of above-the-surface visuality (limpidity) and below-thesurface virtuality (opacity) is isomorphic to the way the crystal image binds actual and virtual image in a relation of immediacy, consecutiveness, symmetry, and simultaneity.⁵ Sleepy Haven features scenes that show anchors being dropped into the water, nude men reclining in a motion that parallels the dropping of the anchors, and books being tossed from bunk beds into water by sailors turning in their sleep. By breaking the surface of the water, these

acts signify a blurring of the divide between the limpid and the opaque, suggesting the equivalence of different states of consciousness, alternative forms of experience, and diverse modes of narration. This scene also indicates that the ship's vertical binary of above/below is but one aspect that helps constitute its crystalline structure. Other aspects are its freedom from landlocked forms of order and its centrality to the world of myth. In this sense, Sleepy Haven makes clear how the significance of the ship as conceived by Deleuze arguably intersects with the figure of homosexuality as conceived by Genet. Müller explores the potentials of homosexuality as a force existing apart from civilization, but also indirectly shaping it — just as ships connect civilizations without belonging to them, creating for their sailors spaces of alterity that, like homosexuality itself, nonetheless closely coalesce with the realm of the normative.

The notion of coalescence not only informs fictional topographies in which transgressive sexual subcultures exist under the very eyes of the heteronormative world.

> OPPOSITE Matthias Müller, TOP Home Stories (1990), MIDDLE and BOTTOM Sleepy Haven (1993).

- 3 See my discussion of Genet's Querelle and Fassbinder's adaptation of it in Grundmann (2011). Genet's novel early on explicitly addresses itself to "inverts" and it states: "The notion of love or lust appears as a natural corollary to the notion of Sea and Murder — and it is, moreover, the notion of love against nature" (Genet, 1974, p. 4).
- 4 In his effort to understand the relation between the human act of seeing and the ontological and aesthetic status of the world of images, Deleuze accords special significance to the cinema. The cinema, according to Deleuze, like no other art form responds to the act of seeing with a pool of images. While the proliferating nature of this pool suggests that the cinema spins ever bigger circuits of images that unite an actual image with virtual doubles such as recollection images and dream images (rendered via flashbacks, for example), Deleuze's interest turns to the crystal image, the smallest, most contracted of these image circuits that focuses on the closest possible relation between the image and its double. Deleuze develops his argument out of an engagement with Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Macmillan, 1911).
- 5 For an analysis of the narrative and philosophical implications of the representation of ships in films, see Grundmann (2012). This essay forms the beginning of a project that theorizes the historical, phenomenological, and aesthetic dimensions of ships, specifically of ocean liners, and their representations in film and visual culture.



Matthias Müller, Alpsee (1994).

It is just as suggestive in explaining how gay culture has historically contributed to mainstream culture in a specific way, namely by multiplying (in some cases shattering) its meanings — or by creating virtual dimensions for what is perceived as actual. To formulate it broadly, one of the recurring roles for gayness in the history of western civilization has been the creation of ambiguity. Gayness has been poised to perform this function because of its historically liminal and transgressive status — because it is seen as different and sees things differently.

Needless to say, gayness does not have an exclusive hold on producing the effect of ambiguity. Mnemonic poems such as The Memo Book and Pensão Globo (1997) derive from a broader modernist aesthetic in which the act of seeing and the act of remembering are indissociable. Then again, at least since the age of Proust, Gide, and Wilde, the discursive nature of memory has been linked to tropes of homosexuality. In Müller's mnemonic films, it is homosexuality that subjects the Deleuzian concept of the time image to a process of radical proliferation. The same can be said about Alpsee (1994), a film representing a boy's memory of his latently disquieting 1960s childhood home and upbringing. While not lyrical like The Memo Book, Alpsee's color-saturated 35mm stock evokes the uncanny feeling that not all is well in the world of the West-German economic miracle.⁶ But Müller takes the relation between prosperity and repression into yet another direction by linking the boy to his mother in ways that evoke Freudianderived clichés about male homosexuals' over-attachment to their mothers. Not only does Müller's boy anxiously follow mother's every step — in another one of Müller's remarkable metonymic substitutions, the boy steps in front of a curtain that gives way to the identically colored fabric of his mother's flowing fifties skirt. This move at once depathologizes and deterritorializes the Freudian idiom identifying homosexuality as inherently performative, as the boy's position on a curtained-off stage references his occupation of the space between private and public, and signifies the ability of the remembering subject to reflect upon his relationship to his mother.

Müller's skillful cinematic troping of psychoanalytic discourses and his equally deft mining of movie history (the attachment to mother and the luminous glass of milk indicate Müller's appreciation of the films of Alfred Hitchcock) identify the gay author, no matter how marked he may be by sexual alterity, as a socialized subject and pop culture scavenger. Müller's post-millennial works, particularly his found-footage films, continue to reveal an artist operating between mass culture and personal mythology. Yet, such found footage works as Phoenix Tapes (1999), Manual (2002), Play (2003), and Kristall (2006), which are the products of artistic collaboration with heterosexual artist Christoph Girardet, are less easily placed within gay contexts — which is not to say that they are completely devoid of queer moments. Phoenix Tapes consists of six videotapes that show recurring motifs from forty Hitchcock films. Müller and Girardet here succeed in capitalizing on Hitchcock's ability to defamiliarize mundane gestures and interactions. Manual compiles excerpts from a broad range of Hollywood films in which hands turn dials, push buttons, and flip levers and switches. The great majority of excerpts feature male hands. They represent a protagonist's proactive stance, which, in the classical Hollywood era, was associated with men. The effect of slight dissonance produced when Müller and Girardet insert a few close-ups of female hands sharply foregrounds the inherently gendered nature of what Deleuze called the movement image.

By contrast, the Hollywood moments excerpted in Play and Kristall are not about action, but reaction. Play excerpts scenes structured around the beginning or end of musical performances that feature anxious performers and applauding audiences. Kristall excerpts over one hundred moments from classical Hollywood and European art films of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s — a period Müller returns to over and over again in his career —that showcase glamorous stars gazing at their own reflections in mirrors. The scenes' retardation of narrative flow make them exemplary of Deleuze's concept of the time image,⁷ while the positioning of the actors in front of the mirror more specifically references the subcategory of the crystal image that splits into actual and virtual image, putting the objective and the subjective and the real and the imaginary into a tight conceptual clasp. While the movement image would continue to have a relatively strong influence in Hollywood in the post-war era, Kristall's compilation of scenes from 1940s Hollywood melodramas and films noir makes clear that here, too, movement became relativized by time — or, as demonstrated by the spectacular scene of mirrors being shot to smithereens in The Lady from Shanghai, movement literally shatters from the inside.

The scenes showcased in Kristall feature moments in which, in front of the mirror, the heroes or heroines experience pensiveness, paralysis, or paranoia, or are overcome by a sense of nostalgia, melancholia, or other aspects of memory. Already in their original contexts these moments prompt audiences to ponder the possibilities and uncertainties of the narrative junctures these scenes present. When showcased one after another in an avantgarde compilation, however, the scenes open up a whole universe of possibilities, expressed in layer after layer of virtuality. Müller and Girardet enhance this effect by digitally altering some of the images, introjecting brief moments in which parts of a face suddenly look squeezed or blurred, as in a fun house mirror. The artists here do not merely play around with the technology available to them, but rather the digital distortion has its own implications. As these tweaks solely affect the mirror reflections of the characters shown in the scene, they render these images once again unique - or, in Deleuze's terms, they lend the virtual image its own actuality, dispelling any notion that the virtual image is ontologically subordinate to the actual image. The distortion in the mirror redirects our attention back to the "actual" person in front of it, whose representation on celluloid becomes further foregrounded for its reified aesthetic conventions. In Kristall, Müller and Girardet make the virtual and the actual constantly trade places. It is this move that signifies the centrality of the concept of coalescence, which, in various aesthetic, philosophical, and artistic guises, informs all of Matthias Müller's films, whether they explore a specifically gay, often solitary, mythology or position the artist in relation to an outside world in which he enters into coalitions and creative collaborations.

6 See Bronfen, 2004. While Bronfen does not include a discussion of Alpsee, her essay is a useful introduction to the concept of the uncanny in Müller's and Girardet's work.

7 See Deleuze (1989; pp. 1-24). While the movement image, as Deleuze explains, was determined by goaloriented narratives in which characters are defined by movement and engagement in and through space, after World War Two, a change took place in the cinema whereby time ceases to be the measurement of normal movement. Time would now increasingly be foregrounded as its own entity. It would emancipate itself from cinematic movement, which tended to denaturalize the representation of movement, making it look paradoxical. Deleuze links these aesthetic shifts to the rise of European art cinema, which must, in turn, be regarded as an aesthetic response to the cataclysmic experiences of the war, whose aftermath, as is chillingly evident in such films as Roberto Rossellini's Germany — Year Zero (1947), had "greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe" (ibid., p. XI).

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THE FALL OF DAYS

Luther Price's Nine Biscuits



Luther Price, *The Biscuit Day* (2007). All images frame enlargements, courtesy the artist and James Hansen.

JAMES HANSEN

Close up: a wrinkled hand grips a series of old photographs. An elderly African American woman narrates the pictures, flipping from one image to the next. "...my niece's son that graduated in May." She slowly rotates the top photo behind the others. "And this is my husband in his casket." Before she finishes speaking, before the next photograph is fully revealed, the film sharply cuts to the same woman seated in a wheelchair facing a long line of windows, her back turned to the camera. She begins speaking again — "I didn't have much thoughts about it" — but her voice is severed by another sharp cut, the film now returning to the first image, a wrinkled hand gripping a series of old photographs: "...my niece's son that graduated in May. And this is my husband in his casket."

These images are from Nice Biscotts #1 (2004), the first of nine films in a series - The Biscott Series (2004-08)1 — from Massachusetts-based artist Luther Price. Price often works with found footage, ultimately creating one-of-a-kind original film prints. With The Biscott Series, Price recovered from a dumpster thirteen deteriorating, identical film prints of a 1974 documentary entitled Old, Black, and Alive about the residents of a nursing home in the rural Alabama. The Biscott Series reconstructs the footage into miniature vignettes, small life stories from a group of aging individuals now lost in time. However, their stories are uniquely filtered through Price's engagement with the footage and the film material. According to the critic Nathan Lee, Price "has the extremely rare ability to formulate other people's images into his own sincere, shattering speech."2 Far from merely uncovering forgotten documentary footage, Price obsessively reworks the footage so as to speak through the images, communicating in his own manner alongside his subjects. He constructs a dialogue amongst the separate figures and the isolated stories. Unlike other found footage filmmakers, Price never attempts to ironically undermine the material, utilizing the figures as lifeless pawns. Rather, the films illustrate the emotional stakes and underlying condition of the subjects through Price's obsessive editing of the physical film. In a sense, each film becomes a character of its own. Operating in solemn conjunction with the documentary subjects, Price's editing operates as a form of what Jacques Ranciere calls "silent speech" 3 — a gestural mode of speaking with the subjects through its very silence.

Several films focus on a single resident: Grandma, a cantankerous woman in Old September Biscuits (2008) who energetically extolls the virtues of aging; Bull, the illustrious godfather of the supermarket in Nice Baskets (2006) who proudly reports, "I've got more people outta jail than I got fingers and toes!"; the silent blind woman, carefully shuttled from location to location in The Biscuit Day (2007); and, perhaps most notably, Mrs. Johnson, the strong, yet sorrowful narrator of Nice Biscotts #1 (2005), who also prominently appears in Same Day, Nice Biscotts (2005) and Suffering Biscuits (2007). Her resolve gradually weakening, alone with her pictures, she ponders the life she had and tries to do the very best she can.

Included among a number of screenings dedicated to Price after his well-received slide projections and retrospective film program at the 2012 Whitney Biennial,4 The Biscott Series were shown together as a complete series for the first time, first at the Wisconsin Film Festival and then at The Wexner Center for the Arts. They are now available on DVD through Canyon Cinema. Only in seeing the nine films together can Price's striking ambition be fully recognized.

The Biscott Series renews Price's interest in family mythologies, so vital in his own 8mm and 16mm films of the late 1980s and early 1990s,5 and locates it among the displaced figures of the nursing home. In some cases, Price's reliance on repetition, present from the opening moments of Nice Biscotts #1, suggests an indefatigable ritual revealing of an inner experience that nonetheless remains unknowable to others. On the other hand, Price's affective cutting and re-cutting of actions, words, and

- 1 The spelling of Biscuits/Biscotts alternates throughout the series as well as the program notes where the films have been shown. The same films have been spelled multiple ways. You say Biscuit, I say Biscott. I would suggest this as a productive slippage which echoes the position in which Price locates the subjects of the films. With the titles, this extends even further into the untranslatability of language and experience, thereby shadowing the major concerns of the series which I raise throughout this essay.
- 2 Nathan Lee, "Looking Forward & Back," New York Sun, Oct 10, 2005.
- 3 Jacques Ranciere, The Future of the Image (New York: Verso 2007), p. 13.
- 4 The Biscott Series was notably absent from the Biennial.
- 5 For more information on this period, see: Luther Price: Imitation of Life, New York: Thread Waxing Space (1998); Tom Rhoads: Three Films, New York: Dirty Looks (2013).

phrases creates a profound effect through the combination of sound and image in which individual moments spark memory and remembrance in mind of the viewer. In this way, he establishes a profound dissonance between the multiple temporalities in which the footage operates. Price locates The Biscott Series at the rupture where forgotten histories and the ephemeral presence of memory collide. Here, the films are deeply involved not just in repetition as ritualistic behavior, but, moreover, in oral traditions, the cyclical telling and re-telling of stories as a means of accessing emotions and histories that are slipping beyond our grasp. The Biscott Series embodies that terrifying slippage.

"Please do not pass me by"

While Nice Biscotts #1 focuses primarily on one unnamed resident, Nice Biscotts #2 offers a more widespread engagement with varying locations and residents of the nursing home. 6 A tracking shot slides down a long hallway, passing two residents seated on chairs as a warbling female voice sings over the footage. A woeful song with off-pitch voices casts a haunting mood over the seemingly innocent images. The first several minutes establish a series of images to which Price returns throughout the nine minute running time: a close up of an arm wrapped by a blood pressure cuff; a seated woman reading a pamphlet, refusing to look at the camera as it passes; a woman rocking back and forth behind a door as the camera slowly creeps in, her head raising to peer at the camera at which point it quickly retreats; a man lying in his bed, the camera slightly circling as it looks down upon him; the same image from Nice Biscotts #1 of the woman seated in the wheelchair facing a long line of windows recurs; a woman in close up turning left to right to stare into the camera; another woman seated in a cafeteria table, slapping her forehead with her left hand and leaving it there to rest.

Soon, these images appear as prodding and intrusive. The playful storytelling which began Nice Biscotts #1 gives way to a sense of fear and isolation. The song lyrics ("please do not pass me by") reveal a contradiction in the purely observational nature of the footage, pointing toward the disengaged subjects, the camera often literally refusing to pause as it passes the residents. This occurs in Nice Biscotts #1 when Price cuts to images around the word "Helpless." as the narrator goes about her daily life, struggling to push her wheelchair forward, wiping her face with a crumbly napkin, or staring directly into the camera. Later in Nice Biscotts #2, Price inverts the positive imagery/negative voices. The narrator reiterates, "I ask them to bless this institution and bless those that are serving." While Price's use of repetition gives the images a sense of endless recall, a sense of ongoing devastation, the voices nevertheless emerge as unwittingly hopeful.

Price is less interested in merely positioning a binary tension between positive and negative, sound and image; instead, in these early films, repetitive practice and elliptical editing initiates his own dialogue with the footage, operating alongside the images, which, in turn, not only grants newfound agency to the residents not least by granting a voice to the poor, rural African American subjects of the documentary footage — but also extends the footage outward as a means for the artist to confront the audience. In this way, Price neither attempts to transcend the tranquil imagery nor to uniformly abstract it through repetition, but instead he flips it outside-in, so that the subjects, himself, and the audience interact directly with the found footage and, perhaps, begin to experience it from within, the films and the audience becoming characters within these fading memories. However, Price's editing recognizes the impossible distance between the present and past, the footage as history and the materially present. The films act as interfaces suspended between these plural modalities. As such, he and we always remain on the outside of the work and its subjects even as we operate from within.7

If Nice Biscotts #1 and Nice Biscotts #2 immediately demarcate the tension between the footage as historical and the footage as present, later films in the series continue specifying this effect, often through the isolation of a particular resident, transforming them from lifeless images into active, engaging personalities. Moreover, as already stated, Price's editing imparts a unique agency to the reworked footage placing it in direct dialogue with the residents. Other films continue illustrating the sorrow and fear that comes with aging alone or in an institution. Thus, again, Price remarkably breaches an irresolvable condition and represents both the beauty and the despair that inevitably coexists in life by placing the films in an interstitial punctured space of slippage between history and memory.

"When I was young, I was young..."

Nice Baskets and Old September Biscuits showcase two characters — Bull and Grandma, respectively — who tell their life stories and reflect on their present conditions. Nice Baskets is the only film that allows no glimpses into the nursing home. The camera pans left to right outside of a supermarket. At the far right edge of the building, there is a sign for Bulls Realty Co. An old man saunters into the store as his voice over begins narrating the scene. Images start to cycle through: boys try on sunglasses, a younger man arranges shopping carts, a cashier punches numbers into the register, a clerk pulls food down a checkout lane, a boy sweeps the sidewalk outside the sliding doors. All the while, Bull's story transforms into a series of repetitive phrases: "I wanted to make a trade." "They put me as a





Luther Price, LEFT Nice Biscotts #2 (2005), RIGHT Singing Biscotts (2007).

delivery boy." "I'd ring the bell." "He's alright!" "Anything they want done, they'd call Bull." As more customers enter and exit, there is a sense that Bull has been in this supermarket forever, telling these stories to everyone who enters with the same sardonic, charismatic wit.

Grandma of Old September Biscuits remains defiantly seated on a chair in the corner of a room throughout the film. She nods her head and spits into a cup. Price actively chops apart her speech, arranging a series of sounds and gestures that become engrained in the viewer's memory. Each statement, each repetition, enacts another entering or exiting of the room, another phone call, another visit to a woman who has been left on her own. She wryly states, "Some is old that wants to be young. I tell 'em call me Grandma! I want 'em to recognize me." She nods her head and spits into a cup. "I says I like to age old." She points to the camera. "When I was young, I was young!" Later, "I feel like I can sit in this corner here," "this corner here," "this corner." Her comic charm comes from her irony — she knows that she won't be visited. Nevertheless, she enjoys her life and accepts her condition. "I don't mind! I'm glad to be able to get old." The film ends as she says "I enjoy" Price cuts to a close up. She nods her head. Amongst the deep sorrow of some other characters, Grandma stands as hopeful and strong. She represents as an uplifting counterpoint, a voice of youthful optimism in the face of despair. She is cornered by an absence, but she sits resolutely in her corner. There is a sense in which Price is right there with her, forever present.

Singing Biscuits (2007) and Inkblot #11: The Biscuit Song (2008) offer a kind of psalm, a peace offering, through which Bull, Grandma, and others may find hope. The two films utilize identical footage of a young African American choir, which has presumably come to visit the nursing home. In Singing Biscuits, the camera pans across the faces of the singers. They sing an old gospel song, "Lead Me, Guide Me." The repetitive chorus — "lead me, guide me, for if you lead me, I cannot stray" - enacts a ritualistic daily prayer, a continual request for strength in the midst of difficulty. Price keeps the footage largely intact, displaying a respect for the footage without falling into irony or cynicism.

Inkblot #11: The Biscuit Song is part of Price's Inkblot Series, in which he paints over found footage, creating a dazzling effect of radiant color that flashes by, frame by frame, at an indecipherable speed. Smothered by layers

> 6 At both retrospective screenings, curators John Powers of the Wisconsin Film Festival and Chris Stults of the Wexner Center for the Arts chose to begin the program with this film rather than showing the films in chronological order. Their non-chronological order opens up the films in productive ways. See "The Biscott Series," Wexner Center for the Arts, Program Notes May 10, 2012.

> 7 Here, I am drawing upon Akira Lippit's theorization of "ex-cinema," a mode of address drawn from the Greek term exergue. For ex-cinema, the film material "refers to a space outside the work, outside the essential body of the work, and yet is part of it, even essentially - a part and apart." See: Akira Lippit, Ex-Cinema: From A Theory of Experimental Film and Video (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2013), pp. 1-14.



Luther Price, Suffering Biscuits (2007).

of paint and ink, the images and soundtrack cry out from beneath the extraordinarily tactile, lively surface. Even more so than other Inkblot films in the series, the images in Inkblot # 11 are almost completely buried under the paint although, when seen on film, remnants of the imagery remain. Acting as a coda to the series,8 The Biscuit Song indicates Price's engagement with the footage more directly on his own terms, but in so doing, suggests his attempt to lead the viewer into and through the abstracted image. However, if peace and grace are to be found, there are always other layers, materials, and experiences that must be accounted for. The ink, acting as shimmering stained glass over the gospel scene, reflects the difficulties with which these images and tales can be accessed, remembered, and finally recognized. The images and subjects are smothered by the layered skin of time. Still, the ink refracts a new light onto them, through them, and around them - a multi-colored halo emanating in and out of the Biscotts.

If Singing Biscuits and The Biscuit Song represent prayers for strength, The Biscuit Day and Same Day, Nice Biscuits show the daily difficulties brought on by the subject's supreme isolation. The Biscuit Day responds to resolute acceptance of Nice Baskets and Old September Biscuits and illustrates the enormous difficulty of quotidian tasks carried out by the residents. An old woman walks down a long sidewalk while a man and a woman grip each of her arms. Step by step, Price cuts backward, repeating the motions as the woman attempts to move forward; the quick edits accentuated by white film leader. The temporal dimension feels endless. Eventually, the woman is loaded into a large white van. An offscreen voice reports, "She is totally blind." The camera awkwardly swings around the vehicle. The woman gazes ahead. The voice repeats the difficulties "for a blind person...for a blind person..." The Biscuit Day is defined by this endless shuttling between locations, moving from one "home" to another - none of which are homes at all. Instead, the neverending journey shows the figure as forever displaced.

Same Day, Nice Biscuits appears as if it will offer an alternative view of The Biscuit Day. The majority of the film is set outside. Price cuts between relatively tranquil images of nature: a flowing lake, a budding flower, a bird resting on a fence, a rooster's crow — the sign of a new day. Then, a strange image of a decaying doll is introduced. An unseen narrator speaks of trees and how "in the length of time they die out." The rooster crows. The days pass. There are images of an old house in the woods, standing next to fractured trees and a rickety porch. Further confounding the audience, Price punctuates the film with two brief glimpses of a woman sobbing. Achieving a heartbreaking effect, there is a sense in which this woman has been there

day after day, alone, transforming the world around her into sinister traces of encroaching death.

"Why are you crying, Mrs. Johnson?"

The contradictory impulses and irresolvable tensions that percolate throughout The Biscott Series erupt in Suffering Biscuits, an alarming, masterful work. Here, Price's own dialogue with the footage is fully apparent. At the same time, he manages to coalesce the liberated footage with his own recreation of the footage as such; that is, the resident's voices gain a newfound agency and dissonantly unite while at the same time remaining immiscible from Price's own. Suffering Biscuits creates a delayed, fragmented confrontation between the fissured layers of the image: between found footage and its subjects, Price and the footage, Price and the subjects, and, finally, Price's film and the viewer.

The film begins with a close up of a woman's face. Seated in a wheelchair in a long hallway, she sings a gospel song along with several other residents. "He will save you. He will save you. Just now." Price repeats the image several times, the camera slowly swaying from side to side, a strange dance as if it were in a church pew. A voice starts interrupting the scene. It cuts to a close up of clenched hands, turning into a shaking fist. The woman's anxious fingers wrestle each other. These haunting hands cover a bottle of rubbing alcohol, resting in her lap, as her feet methodically rock back and forth. "He was without sin, and we got to suffer..."

After several variations, Price's fracturing of sound and image becomes apparent. The same phrases are heard over the same images. The edits are faster, the clips shorter, the repetitive quality undeniable. Her underlying psychological terror becomes palpable. The effect is overwhelmingly powerful. She directs her speech off camera. "We have failed..." She wipes her left cheek. "There's nothing particular in life that I want to accomplish...and I've accepted that." As earlier, the unfailing acceptance of the woman slowly wears away, as her dialogue breaks apart and tears well to the surface. As she cries out regarding her strength and happiness, Price shows images of her hands strewn across her face, tears streaming down her cheeks. Her tears are Price's tears and our own. Quickly, Price cuts back to the gospel song, the only bit of respite she, he, and we can find amidst the unequivocal dread.

An offscreen voice asks, "Why are you crying, Mrs. Johnson?" Price's edits have her answer, "Happy." The image becomes unsettled through this ostensible disconnection. Price shuffles at a rapid pace between shots. Sound and image are increasingly unfastened from one another. "I don't feel like I'm weak!" Her interior strength met by an external outpouring of emotion, Mrs. Johnson says "I'm not crying being sorry," she weeps for "this congregation she never expected to see," and prays "It's a blessing. And I hope y'all be blessed too."

Strength through weakness, weakness through strength, Mrs. Johnson's complex emotions flood over until they overwhelm the screen and the film ends. Speaking to the ones who left her, to the ones who are there, and to the ones who will be there — to us, just now — her tears remain searing. In Price's own words:

ONLY WANTED.....THOSE TO SHE KNOW SHE LOVED AND WAS GOOD..... LEFT IN THE FALL OF DAYS......ALONE SHE ONLY HAD HERSELF TO SHIVER.....HER TREMBLING FIST CLENCH FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T SEE OR HEAR NOR UNDERSTAND..... THE NEAREST OF DEATH.....9

Suffering Biscuits stands as a devastating eulogy for those abandoned and discarded by loved ones, by history, and by time itself. With the ritualized gestures and repeated stories burned into memory, Price both celebrates and mourns his inaccessible subjects by silently speaking, quietly shivering, with and within the resident's own speech. The Biscott Series proposes that we too must shiver alongside our unknown friends, our forgotten stories, our fragmented histories. Our Biscotts.

- 8 Wisconsin Film Festival curator John Powers classified it as such. See "The Biscott Series," Wexner Center for the Arts, Program Notes 5/10/12.
- 9 Email correspondence. Jan 19, 2013.

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THE DOUBLE PATHS OF NICOLAS REY: ON AUTREMENT, LA MOLUSSIE (DIFFERENTLY, MOLUSSIA)

CHRISTA BLÜMLINGER

TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH BY ANDREW ST. MAURICE

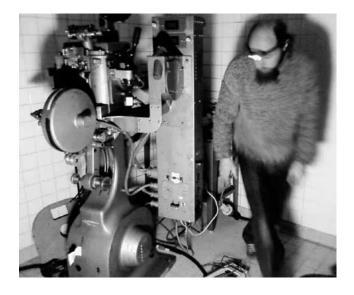
"How can one begin a story?" This is the question fundamentally, ethically, and pedagogically — of Günther Anders' Die molussische Katakombe, an essayistic, fragmentary, visionary novel of the interwar period, only published in German, decades after its completion.1 The question is articulated at the center of a system of relays, which pass between prisoners gathered together in dark caves; they exchange stories of the totalitarian regime that marked them as pariahs. From generation to generation, the inmates pass down their stories in order to hold on to the memory of History, to be able to one day liberate themselves from their subjugation to the dictatorial force

that leads this imaginary country, called Molussia. It is always the oldest, Olo, who approaches Yegussa, the youngest, in order to teach him to write fables which revolve around his own life, and to analyze the connection between lies and power. The latter then adds to his question: "...to begin would already be a falsification." For Anders, the truth can only emerge by means of the art of falsification, by paradox, and by exaggeration.

How can one begin a film? Nicolas Rey, in his essay-film autrement la Molussie (2012)² incorporates a number of parabolical stories from this novel, stories nested one within another, and, inspired by the source, devises a structure in response that is quite different, yet equally bewildering. He positions this question of a beginning within a reel, one element of the nine reels that comprise the film, and which does not

find its place in the sequence until the moment the 16mm film is projected. For, according to the instructions of the filmmaker, the order of the reels is random, established by the projectionist at every screening. Rey shares this taste for the combinatorial with the German novelist, who chose as his nom de plume "Anders" — "different" or "otherwise." The intertitles at the start of each reel often imply a philosophical or allegorical dimension. Originating in Anders' novel, they describe narratives as chains of actions, but only insomuch as they imply ethical considerations among the prisoners: the fables. "The Positive Is Invisible," "Hatred Kills as It Comes," or even "The Strongest Word"

analyze the principles of power and of governance in the totalitarian regime of Burru, a character strongly inspired by the Nazi dictator. The title of the story that includes the conversation about beginnings is "What the Connections Are." In autrement la Molussie, the title is presented against a mauve background, the film being sectioned by monochrome title cards in various colors. Each reel thus displays its own autonomy, and the series of these monadic block titles constitutes a rare poetic ensemble, proposing a double path: simultaneously the reading of a forgotten text3 and the exposition of extraordinary perspectives originating in a supposedly obsolescent medium. The film



1 Günther Anders, Die molussische Katakombe, C.H. Beck, 1992; new complete edition, edited by Gerhard Oberschlick, 2012. Anders had drafted a first version in Berlin between 1930 and 1932, which Brecht had delivered to the publishing house Kiepenheuer. The manuscript was then saved from the Nazis and revised in Paris and New York between 1934 and 1938. The first edition was finally published shortly after Anders'

2 Winner of the grand prize at the "Cinema du réel" festival, 2012.

3 The novel was out of print by the time Nicolas Rey's film was in production. No translation exists in either French or English.

creates a fundamental disconnect between the soundtrack containing these fantastical stories, and the visuals, which consist of observations of a world both real and sensible — the very manner by which natural elements are transformed in our era by civilization and its techniques. This disconnect between sound and image corresponds to the situation of the characters in the novel, who can listen,

- 4 The Molussian Catacomb details a possibility for a successful revolution, brought about through the prisoners' resistance. The stories passed on by oral means are paradoxically transcribed via the overseers' audition. - Anders had ended the manuscript before the war, and considered the novel in hindsight to have lost its sense of actuality: the Germans had not managed to liberate themselves from National Socialism. But the novel's optimism remains relative, as the revolution is only realized after several hundred years. Cf. Gerhard Oberschlick, afterword to the new edition of Günther Anders, Die molussische Katakombe, op. cit., pp. 450-452.
- 5 "[...] Fabeln sind nicht Abbilder, sondern Apparate," ibid., p. 97 (my translation). On the didactical function of the fable in Anders' work, see Andreas Pfersmann, "La pompe à incense d'avanthier. Günther Anders fabuliste," in Jacques Le Rider and Andreas Pfersmann (eds.), Austriaca, no. 35, December 1992, special Gunther Anders issue, pp. 113-124.
- 6 Cf. Jacques Aumont, L'Œil interminable (1989), new edition, La Différence, 2007, p. 53.
- 7 Foucault's concept of visibility equally envisages that which structures thought in advance. Cf. John Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing" in October, Vol. 44, (Spring, 1988), pp. 88-117.
- 8 Gilles Deleuze describes in this way the relation between image and sound in Marguerite Duras' work (L'Image-temps, Cinéma 2, Minuit, 1985, p. 327, English transl. The Time-Image, Cinema 2, The Athlon Press, London, 1989, pp. 253-259); Pascal Bonitzer, Le Regard et la Voix, 10/18, 1976, p. 31 et seq.
- 9 In the press kit, Rey explains that he used expired 16mm stock, a gift from a friend.
- 10 Cf. Hollis Frampton, "For a metahistory of film: Commonplace notes and hypotheses," in Hollis Frampton, Circles of Confusion: Film Photography Video, ed. by Annette Michelson, Rochester, New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983, pp. 115-116.
- 11 Nathaniel Dorsky, "Notes sur un autre cinéma," Trafic no. 74, summer 2010, p. 17.

but cannot see except by means of their imaginations or in their dreams.

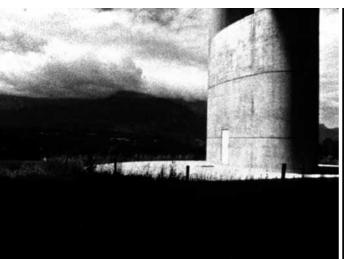
Through the embedded fragments of the story, and the cuts and re-orderings of the conversations of the prisoners in their dark caves, Rey creates an absurd, Kafkaesque atmosphere which imposes itself in place of the Brechtian lesson⁴ suggested by the novel. If Anders has a didactical conception of his prose, which the title of one of his chapters, for example, embodies — "Fables are not reproductions, but apparatuses"5 (a title which is not present in the film) — Rey seems to want to displace, indeed disorient, this approach, in aiming for the very question of reproduction: it gives us images of the real, that is, the everyday aspects of our environment and our civilization, which carry the trace of their technical basis and the presence of the devices which produced them. "Made by the hand of the Abominable," a title card at the end of a reel reads, concluding a sequence during which slowly, in an undulating motion, the camera tracks along the shore of a lake, then climbs toward a group of trees and a sky which seems to irradiate the landscape. One is able to make out a few buildings of a hydroelectric plant. These vistas, sometimes submerged in a sort of fog, oscillate between areas of midnight blue and a yellow ochre, veering on bright yet washed out pink that overwhelms the surrounding colors. The last shot in the sequence is still, a panorama of an enormous railway bridge spanning a valley. All at once, the point of view begins to shift. The camera turns rapidly before this landscape like a top, then slows its circular movement and steadies itself in a reversed position. A train passes, suspended, under the bridge. It is at once the sign and the pendant of the mechanical eye, which we can call, in Jacques Aumont's phrasing, "endless," for it embodies a mobile representation which Peter Galassi attributes to certain proto-photographic paintings: the vision of the world as the interrupted site of potential images.

The filmmaker retains and expands certain emphases in Anders' thought. The category of visibility, for example, so heavily theorized in "The Strongest Word," serves for Anders as a demonstration of the fundamental principles of fascist power. Hence the goal of Burru would have been to "become elected by those he had conquered." And, for Olo, the results of this: "The how and why are invisible, but the result of the election, for its part, will be visible. One remembers only the visible." It is such moments that a materialist theory of the invisible emerges from these considerations, with a striking relation to certain of Foucault's ideas.7 When one listens to this passage from the novel in autrement, la Molussie, the shot which accompanies the off-screen voice does not manifest any evident connection with the story; but it possesses a substantial fictional power resulting from its

pictorial quality. From a slight overhead angle, one sees the whole of a small, traditional French village, with its church and its stone houses. The static shot shows its place at the center of a bucolic landscape, with hills traversed by narrow, undulating roads and dotted with shrubs. The village is oddly lit, not by electricity, but by a singular combination of natural light, unstable film and variable exposure, producing a chiaroscuro effect in the manner of Caspar David Friedrich. The shifting visual effects recall those that one finds in silent film, for example in Murnau's work: the light recedes, the sun pierces the clouds. The steeple, the facade of the church, a fragment of the straw-covered field each stand out in contrast with one another. These elements are brought into focus by a luminous beam which brushes across them, determined solely by atmospheric variations. The shot is almost monochromatic, as if tinted, a pale yellow pervading the illuminated sections. Suddenly the landscape is submerged in dark blue. The village is now surrounded by a light shimmering mist, reflecting two or three electric lights. Toward the end of the sequence, when the offscreen voice has completed its story of Burru's lies, one hears nothing except the singing of birds and the distant droning of machines. In a sense at once relative and absolute, realistic and improbable, manifestly asynchronous, this offscreen sonorous ambiance takes over from the autonomous voice which one can identify, with Gilles Deleuze and Pascal Bonitzer, as "off-off."8 An increasingly astonishing formal spectacle establishes itself from this point on with the same framing. Shots of great beauty follow one another, again as if tinted, in dark, bluish gray-green. The village is continually surrounded by a fog, which reaches up to the point where it joins with the ideal view of the spectator.

Thus, at times, the scene does nothing more than vibrate, overwhelmed by the grain of the expired film stock, the technical characteristics of which will be revealed by the box at the end of the sequence, in pink: "Shot with Agfa-Gevaert film, Gevachrome 722+732."9 This conclusion of the sequence is one of the particularly sublime moments in autrement, la Molussie, celebrating the chemical and physical material bases of the projection. It is at heart a gesture of the "metahistorian" in the sense asserted by Hollis Frampton, who derives "a complete tradition from nothing more than the most obvious material limits of the total film machine."10 For autrement, la Molussie, recalls both Ernie Gehr's History, an ode to the medium of 16mm film and a pure demonstration of the variations and modulations of its luminous structures, and the landscapes filmed by Nathaniel Dorsky, a filmmaker singularly attached to celluloid and to the same format, is convinced that there are considerations particular to the special qualities of each film stock.11 Aware, then, of his gesture, and far from all nostalgia or manneristic posing, Nicolas Rey has invented new arrangements and new modalities of the image, conceived through experimentation with expired film, a specially adapted camera and a collective laboratory which permitted him to work out his film from beginning to end.

The recorded images create little to no grounds for a narrative: one rarely sees human figures, except those who are at work coupled with their tools. There is very little action, and the only dialogue comes from the voice of the reader-cum-storyteller, who appears intermittently with his book, in a makeshift studio. For most of the film this voice remains offscreen, creating what Deleuze terms in Marguerite Duras' works a "heautonomous" sound image,





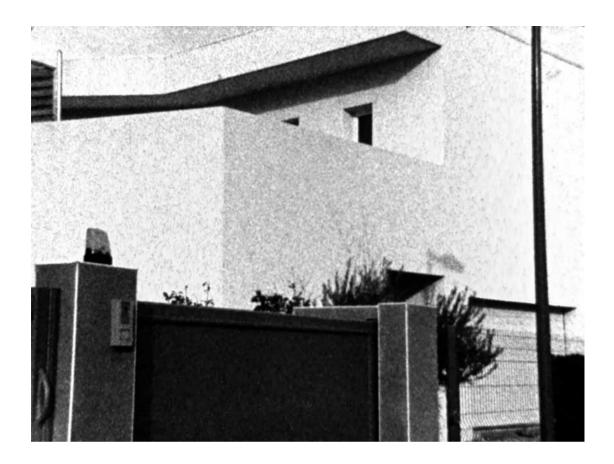


which describes a rupture in relation to the visual image.¹² From the point of view of the image track itself, the experience of the film is rather of the pictorial or screenbased order (in Étienne Souriau's sense of "écranique"), following a structure of micro-events. At regular intervals, the camera flits around and turns away, in a neighborhood of serial, deserted residences as it might before a wall of waves in the Atlantic Ocean. It finds industrial landscapes, suburban landscapes, natural and cultivated. It films sites of production and habitation as future ruins of our civilization. The shots are long and precisely framed. When the view suddenly begins to spin, departing into circular and oblique pans, the "camera-top" (as it is referred to by one of the credit title cards) creates the action, recalling certain shooting techniques invented by Michael Snow.

One is presented with shots of enormous beauty animated by a strange movement, as if they had been filmed by a phantasmagorical machine. The vacillating screen seems to breathe light, at the rhythm of the wind; before it pass, for example, white villas drenched in a high-contrast back-light or in a grainy chiaroscuro. These variations of color and light are in part the result of deliberately chosen experiments with expired film, as the filmmaker already made use of for his "cinematic voyage in a country which

no longer exists," in Les soviets plus L'électricité, in 2001. Through his invention and careful working out of a specific relation between writing and image, Rey can be said to be a filmmaker who brings together two avant-gardes. If Les soviets plus l'électricité situates itself somewhere between Jonas Mekas and Chris Marker, autrement, la Molussie constitutes a successful encounter between Marguerite Duras and Michael Snow.¹³

The film proposes a 'double reading' of Anders' work. The first, explicit reading, is that of the novel, and corresponds to the soundtrack. The second, implicit reading, takes as its vantage point his essay on modernist technique, The Outdatedness of Human Beings (L'obsolescence de l'homme), and emerges within the natural and montage element of the image track. For Anders, the two books also engage in a dialogue with each other: within his most essential philosophico-anthropological writings, he makes use of Molussia as a mythical reference. In The Outdatedness of Human Beings (1956 and 1980), Anders cites a hymn to the cogwheel of this country and appeals to "molussian" studies. 14 This hymn plays a role in the chapter dedicated to the imbalance between human thought and the structural power of machines. One can, with Anders, name this theory of the non-synchronization



of human capacities "the philosophy of disparity." 15 For Rey, who develops a sort of pendulousness from an aesthetic of disparity, the interest given over to technical apparatuses and to the abstract devices which define them, does not imply any obvious pedagogy. But from the idea that Anders calls the "promethean gap" — the division, in the nuclear age, between the potential for destruction and human sensibility of this potential, between technical complexity and a representation of its consequences — the filmmaker seems to have retained a lesson that one could call ecological, in the same sense that James J. Gibson uses the term in his theory of perception, which accounts for the environment and which situates itself at the level of the animal. For the filmmaker creates images that are within easy reach, within human perspective. He films each shot with an analog camera, which enables him to transform or adapt when necessary, and which serves as a photographic support with which he can himself experiment; autrement, la Molussie is a film which corresponds neatly to that which Hollis Frampton termed "the Age of Machines," situating cinema in history, as the "last machine" and last art which "will reach the mind through the senses." 16

Rey's film shows us the technical devices which correspond to this "age" of machines: the grapple of an excavator pulling out tree trunks in the mountains, or 12 Cf. Gilles Deleuze, L'image-temps, op. cit., p. 327, English transl. The Time-Image, Cinema 2, The Athlon Press, London, 1989, pp. 253-259.

13 Rey himself suggests this heritage in inventing, for his press kit, an imaginary dialogue between Duras and Snow. On Les soviets...cf. Christa Blümlinger, "L'électricité moins les soviets" (2003), Images de la culture No. 21, May 2006, pp. 44-46.

14 Cf. Gerhard Oberschlick, afterword to the new edition of Günther Anders, Die molussische Katakombe, op. cit., p. 441; and Günther Anders The Outdatedness of Human Beings. 1. On the Soul in the Era of the Second Industrial Revolution. (in German: Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen 1. Über die Seele im Zeithalter der industriellen Revolution, Munich, C.H. Beck, 1956).

15 Cf. Günther Anders, "Brecht ne pouvait pas me sentir. Entretien avec Fritz J. Raddatz" (1985), in Austriaca no. 35, op. cit., p. 15 (translated by Catherine Weinzorn, published in German in Die Zeit p. 13, March 22, 1985).

16 Hollis Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film..." op. cit., p. 113. Curiously, for Frampton this age ends at the same time as for Anders, in the middle of the century; the epistemological rupture being linked to the invention of radar for the one, to nuclear energy for the other.

tractors tracing lines across the ground in fields and on beaches. Little by little, autrement la Molussie weaves a complex and subtle game of correspondences. Thus the turbines of the "Return to Nature" sequence recall the transformation of kinetic energy into mechanical energy, which permits the film's very production and which figures in the credits of one of the reels. For Rey has made, with Christopher Goulard, what he calls a "zephyrama": a device which modulates the film's frame-rate and consequently the exposure of the film is dependent on the wind's force and direction. In this same sequence, "Proving Proves Nothing," one sees closeups of various people attentively looking beyond the frame, at what are revealed to be screens for observation and for meteorological analysis. At just this moment, the film is streaked with what resembles scales, like a heavy rain, in a surprising affinity with the scene photographed. Hence the machines and mechanisms invisible to the viewer — the "zephyrama" and the "camera-top"— are made sensible by a double process: on the one hand, the reduction of the narration in the image emphasizes the screen and the shots which compose it; on the other, the machines born in the industrial and mechanical age function as pendants to this visual machine. The poetic articulation of this double process leads directly to the thought and power associated with this "last machine" and to its link with history.

And it is no coincidence that the reel signed "A Film by Nicolas Rey" is titled "Ah...Concerning Legacy." In this way the filmmaker inscribes his film within history. This fable, the most pregnant of all, finally bears a resemblance to a postcard sent from beyond the grave, lacking now a sender as well as a receiver, yet continuing to circulate. From the point of view of Anders' fiction, this allegory can extend to the message of truth passed on by the prisoners from decade to decade. From the perspective of Rey's film, it is the projectionists who, through a game of interchange and transmission, will bring to life, the truth of a much more lasting medium than is commonly believed.

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MIRROR MIRROR

KATE MONDLOCH

A panoply of descriptors have been flung somewhat hysterically at Doug Aitken's MIRROR since its unveiling in March 2013. Curators, critics, city officials, and the celebrated multimedia artist himself have proclaimed the screen-reliant work installed on the façade of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) to be everything from "urban earthwork," "media façade," "visitors' plaything," and "Seattle kaleidoscope," to "liquid architecture," "living museum," "curated public space," and "gift for the city." Lessons from a fairy tale come to mind: "Mirror, mirror upon the wall, who is the fairest of all?" The mirror answered: "Thou, O Seattle, art the fairest of all." Time passed, and the mirror was queried again. This time the mirror answered: "Thou, O Museum, art the fairest of all." Just to be sure, the mirror was asked a final time. It answered: "Thou, O citizens and visitors of Seattle, art the fairest of all." In contrast to the decisiveness of its enchanted counterpart, the mirror in this story, or at least the mirror's enthusiastic PR machine (Seattle kaleidoscope! Living museum! Visitors' plaything!), is equivocal. Given the provocative array of somewhat incompatible interpretive cues, how might we begin to assess this work?

MIRROR is a large-scale permanent media installation affixed to the exterior of the Seattle Art Museum in downtown Seattle.1 Two enormous LED screens — roughly the size of two billboards — are mounted on adjacent sides of the building at approximately second story height. Custom software reacts to environmental triggers to churn out ever-changing combinations of video

OPPOSITE Doug Aitken, MIRROR (2013), Seattle Art Museum, gift of Bagley Wright, installation view, photograph by Jeremy Bitterman. Courtesy Seattle Art Museum.

¹ The project is at the intersection of 1st and Union in downtown Seattle (near Pike Place Market). The piece permanently alters the museum's street front — a project initiated with the museum's expansion project led by architect Brad Cloepfil/ Allied Works in 2002 that doubled the museum's space and accommodated Robert Venturi's original design of 1991.



on each screen. The most conspicuous screen (located on the museum's bustling entrance-side), features images culled from hundreds of hours of variably black-and-white or color footage Aitken's studio deemed emblematic of the people and landscape of Seattle and its surrounding areas. The otherwise easily-digested representational images - landmarks, sailboats, traffic, rain - shift and blend in unexpected rhythmic cycles, often to the point of geometric abstraction. The secondary, adjacent screen features linear forms that appear to be related to the first screen principally through their rhythmic pulsation. Coordinated vertical lighting strips of varying heights extend above and below each screen, stretching the work's sculptural presence to nearly the full length of the museum's façade; like the screens, the lights seem to pulse and dance to a shared silent score.

MIRROR is not unprecedented in the multimedia artist's oeuvre - Aitken has worked in sonic, film, and video installation for decades, both inside and, more recently, outside of traditional art gallery spaces. Among the artist's numerous screen-reliant architectural interventions and public media installations of recent years, no fewer than two were specifically sited on the façades of prominent museums — the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Sleepwalkers, 2007) and the Hirshorn Museum in Washington, D.C. (Song 1, 2012).² Both large-scale works employed the museums' exterior walls as temporary projection screens for monumental moving images. In each, for a discrete period of time in the evening, multiple intricately balanced projections exhibited interlocking cinematic vignettes. In Sleepwalkers, the nocturnal routines of five "average" New Yorkers (played by decidedly un-average actors Donald Sutherland and Tilda Swinton, musicians Seu Jorge and Cat Power, and actor/street drummer Ryan Donowho) illuminated the busy evening streets of midtown Manhattan; in Song 1, various singers crooning "I Only Have Eyes For You" engulfed the entire 360-degree exterior of the cylindrical museum on the relatively deserted nocturnal Capitol mall. Notably, both of these public art projects were commissioned with tourism and urban development in mind, the institutions eager to revivify or reaffirm the "public" nature of the museum and its environs. (Song 1 was charged with the heady task of "re-thinking the status of the public monument in the nation's capitol!").

While MIRROR's patrons share the rather problematic conviction that public art must somehow "curate" otherwise deficient public space, the work of



art itself is decidedly more modest. Aitken seems to have absorbed the perceptive critiques of disingenuous "public" engagement, gratuitous celebrity indulgence, and decontextualized cinematic spectacle that plagued the otherwise enthusiastic critical reception of his earlier works. (Tom Vanderbilt's penetrating assessment of Sleepwalkers in Artforum is representative: "The mirrorshades cool of MoMA instead becomes an entrancing urban drive-in (or drive-by), 'celebrity architecture' writ large..."3) Unlike the discrete duration of the colossal projected images in Sleepwalkers and Song 1, the moving images featured on MIRROR's permanent LED and glass screens have no fixed duration: in fact, due to their continuous permutations, the artist speculates that no one will ever see exactly the same thing twice. MIRROR was commissioned for the Seattle Art Museum by a single wealthy patron (the late philanthropist Bagley Wright), yet cannot be described as a straightforward vanity commission (if Wright's Seattle is the "fairest of them all," it is an understated victory based on natural beauty and overlooked occurrences). Though picturesque — Aitken is an undisputed master of cinematography — MIRROR's relatively mundane imagery is far from glamorous or celebrity-oriented, and instead is linked unambiguously to

its specific time and place. The piece is "environmentally responsive:" weather information, pedestrian traffic, and atmospheric conditions trigger and direct the unending cycles of moving images in non-obvious ways. (If the work really does aspire to interact with its real-life, real-time audience — if the viewers are indeed "the fairest of them all"—they're likely to be the last to know).

What is clear is that the piece cannot be thought outside of its relationship to its site. Not unreasonably, "site specific" is one of the most frequently used terms hurled at this work. The "sites," however, are multiple. MIRROR is located in the public realm in an urban environment and, more precisely, in downtown Seattle. The work is

> Doug Aitken, LEFT Sleepwalkers (2007), 6 channel video installation. RIGHT Song 1 (2012), site specific exterior projection. Images courtesy 303 Gallery.

² Still and moving image documentation of the artist's various projects are available via the artist's website. http://www.dougaitkenworkshop.com/selected- work/>

³ Tom Vanderbilt, "City of Glass (on Doug Aitken at MoMA)," Artforum (Jan. 2007): p. 46.

related to its phenomenological site by virtue of being permanently fastened to the Seattle Art Museum façade and exhibiting Seattle-specific images. The installation's insistent locatedness is further emphasized through its environmental responsiveness, and the ways in which its luminous ballet is mirrored in the reflective surfaces of nearby buildings, windshields, sidewalks, and other makeshift screens.

The most significant site, however, may well be the museum architecture itself. What happens when screenreliant installation is sited in public space, and specifically on an art museum? Public media installation art is almost the opposite of its art gallery-based counterpart. If gallerybased media installation suffers from inaccessibility (many film or video installations are displayed only rarely, if at all, and thus cannot be experienced first-hand; many institutions require admission fees that further limit access to the work), the other enjoys abundant (relatively convenient and unrestricted; free) viewing opportunities. Critics have begun to explore what is gained or lost by locating screen-based art in outdoor public spaces. The heretofore critically neglected question posed by works like Aitken's MIRROR, however, is slightly different; that is, "what is gained or lost by moving outside of the gallery walls, if only to their exterior side?" It perhaps goes without saying that a museum façade is a highly specific variant of public space. But what, exactly, does such a site afford?

A work such as MIRROR arguably relies on the museum site to ensure its "art" value — to cue viewers that the moving image work is not the regional tourism board's enthusiastic bid for visitors. (Should viewers fail to recognize the museum edifice, the museum's original neon signage is literally embedded in the work in the form of a 3D "SAM" logo on either side.) Thus assured of its street cred as "art," MIRROR invites its audience to engage it as an experiential object unfolding in space and time (in other words, like an art gallery-based installation). Though one imagines that the temptation must have been great for a work mandated with engaging the general public at a busy urban intersection, MIRROR's "interactivity" is not facile or superficial. If MIRROR is indeed the "city's plaything," the actual "playing" is slow and cerebral. The work's subtle and elusive environmental responsiveness leads its audience to contemplate the increasingly hazy distinction between mirrors and media screens. Do the fluctuating landscape images constitute real-time reflections or mediated effects? How would one know for sure at a cultural moment in which such distinctions are consistently elided?

Brad Cloepfil, architect of the Seattle Art Museum's 2002 expansion and long-time Aitken collaborator, has described his design practice as an attempt to somehow "edit or manifest forces that already exist." The architect's words offer a useful analogy for contemplating MIRROR: site-specific installation whose most profound contribution may well be the creative mobilization of extant dynamisms. It is a mirror, and a screen. Its meaning is in the present moment. Look. Wonder. Look again. Although written in a different context, Aitken's own words intimate such a philosophy of artistic production: "It's very easy to lose track of the environment around you, to lose touch with the present. I wanted the [work] to bring me back to the moment that is."5

- 4 Brad Cloepfil, panel discussion at Seattle Art Museum, March 24, 2013.
- 5 Alix Browne, "Aitken's Acid Modernism," New York Times, March 30, 2012.

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IN THE BEDROOM / ON THE ROAD

A CONVERSATION WITH SADIE BENNING AND JAMES BENNING



BRUCE JENKINS

This conversation took place twenty years ago, in spring 1993, at the end of a week in which James Benning and Sadie Benning each screened their work at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. I invited them to sit down together to discuss some of the ideas that emerged from this experience. The tape of our conversation was transcribed and then set aside for many years, until now. I always liked the interview and felt that it captured both of these artists at key points in their lives (James at fifty, Sadie just turning twenty) and careers. It was done before the full emergence of the digital era, when film and video were still two distinct media, and equally predated the active embrace of these moving-image forms by the world of contemporary art. Two decades later James and Sadie have each moved on to have impressive careers continuing to work in film and video as well as developing significant gallery-based practices.

Bruce Jenkins: Let me just start by having the two of you reflect on your most recent work and the way in which you have been using either film or video, as much as anything else, to work through personal problems, to work through particular points of your life that are addressed in your work. Maybe we'll start with Sadie, and ask how your most recent work balances your interests in what the medium can say with your interests in where you are in your life right now.

Sadie Benning: Oh god! I can understand what you're saying, but . . .

BJ: Let me say it in a better way. So much of what people respond to in your work is how centrally you, as a figure, literally appear in and dominate the work, but also how much the work revolves around your emotions — "I'm anxious," "I'm nervous," "I'm fearful" — something's happening in my own life or something's happening in the life of a girlfriend or a friend. In the most recent work, it's not that you recede as a character, but the most recent work goes a little more outside that immediate area of the personal and begins to look at what the medium can do or how the medium can maybe shed light — not only on you individually . . .

SB: Yeah, but also most recently I've been using a lot of archival footage: more like clips of popular culture, TV stuff. I think in a way it's like a step to come out of my bedroom and use things from television and things that I grew up around. Because from the beginning, I was really isolated in my bedroom. I kind of used the camera just as — it didn't really feel like it was an art medium. It was more like a best friend or something that would sit there, and listen to me, and kind help me organize my thoughts. Now it's still the same, but I've developed not only as a person, but as an artist — technically learning how to do things and visually learning how to put images together.

BJ: I think I'll switch over to the other side. One thing that's most striking about your most recent feature, Jim, is the way in which you've become more comfortable with placing yourself very centrally in the narrative, and at the same time you've loosened up some of the formal components that have almost become your signature. There's always been a very cool, distant, formal aspect to a lot of your work. With North on Evers, you begin to feel that the camera is not locked in, the structure is not fixed. There's not a system that's governing the way the images are produced. There are other systems that might be at play, but there's a kind of relaxed quality, a loose-hipped informality about the images.

James Benning: The biggest change, of course, is that it's all hand-held, which I've never done before. And that's what gives you that feeling of looseness. But it also gives you a feeling of documentation, of home-movie documentation, that becomes very personal. The film also has 1,200 shots in it, which are probably more shots than I've done in all my other films combined. So there are lots of short shots. About a third of the film is edited in the camera, so that's a big change, too, that adds to this looseness. But in a way, even though this film is different, I think it is very much like my earlier works; one has the feeling that it is like one long shot. The text that runs through it becomes the shot, it becomes the road, it becomes the traveling. So when you have four breaks in the text, it's almost like there are only four shots in the whole film. I kind of like that. Even though the structure is much different than my other films (with all these short handheld shots), it relates back to the long take. There's a kind of irony in that that I like.

- BJ: What's interesting about the use of hand-held is that in the traditions of American experimental filmmaking, often when you had the filmmaker using a lot of hand-held material, it was to suggest the consciousness behind the camera. But oddly enough, in looking at those shots in your film, I was not immediately drawn to what emotion, what feeling, what energy created the image. So much of your presence in the film is really in the text, which continuously modulates what you experience when you're watching and participating in the film. It's really this direct patch into your own sensibility that's stronger in that language play than it is in the visual.
- **JB:** The way I look at the text is that there are really two films in one. There's the image, and there's the text that suggests another set of images. Ironically, the text was put on a separate piece of film and shot on an animation stand. So, literally, there are two films. There's the film that has the text on it, and there's the film that has the image on it. And then they're married together in the print. So, in a way, even though I'm using that as a metaphor, literally it's true — there are two films there. Hopefully, what happens when you read the text is that it suggests a set of images in your head that you can then measure against the actual set of film images, which will appear later, since the text and image are not in sync. The text usually comes before the image that it's referring to.
- SB: So that way you visualize it in your head first, and then you're confronted with the actual reality of the text.
- **JB:** One really isn't aware of that until you get into the film. And part of the film, as with many of my films, is discovering how to watch the film, how to enter into it, what to do with this film when you have it. I think a lot of the joy of this film is that discovery and then this actual game of comparing the film in your head with the actual film.
- **BJ:** Texts actually do something similar, not really the same thing, in your work, Sadie. At least in the early work, texts are often a way to get deeper into yourself, to show what can't be shown on camera or on the screen. Or, alternately, there are moments when you use the text to go outside your house or outside your own experience.
- **SB:** In the first tape that I ever made the text was my voice, because I guess I just wasn't comfortable enough with myself and being in front of the camera to put it right in front of me and just start talking. So I used the texts as a way to talk to the camera without actually having to be in front of it. As I've grown, I really like using text, because when people read something they really take it in. They visualize something. And it really registers with them more personally than if someone just sits there and spells everything out for them. It just doesn't hit them like it does when you have to read it. I like how it looks, too. It looks good.
- **JB:** It's almost exactly what I said the other night about *North on Evers*, the way the text functions. Using a voice-over, the film enters through the ears rather than the eyes. By using text, the film doesn't speak to you, but it comes through your brain in such a way that you have to reinterpret that language and then think about it. That's a much different experience than if somebody's reading something to you; you hear their voice rather than that little voice in the head. I absolutely use text in North on Evers because of that. I wanted that kind of engagement with the film rather than the kind of engagement that comes easily to you and becomes entertainment rather than an intellectual experience.
- **SB:** I also like to use my handwriting just because I feel like the videos are like a visual diary in a way. I kind of like to have text in it just because it's my handwriting and it's like you're reading my diary.
- BJ: Does the informality of the technology and the low-end quality of the result feel more in keeping with...
- SB: It's more accurate. I think that camera, especially for what I was going through at that time, feels like it captures more of what I was feeling. Because it's kind of like dreamy, and it's kind of like a Xerox machine, if

- a Xerox machine was a camera. It kind of feels like that because it's all in my head. It's just the ideas lurking around in my head. It's a perfect imagery for it.
- BJ: Whereas it's funny that what you're known for, Jim at least what you made as your first major achievement — were richly colored, multi-leveled, highly formal uses of the medium that sustained a great deal of looking and used the long take, used elements of mise-en-scène and cinematography to visually charge these minimalist stories.
- **JB:** (Silence) Yep. (Laughter)
- BJ: Yeah, so what about it?
- JB: No, I can respond to that. I'd actually like to respond to what Sadie was saying first about the Pixelvision camera reducing things to a dream-state or, as I see it, it reduces things to a metaphor, and that metaphor becomes more real than if one works in a realistic mode. So about the kind of imagery that I make: I've never thought of my films actually as being real. I see them as being beyond hyper-real where I've heightened the colors, pushing them towards that kind of metaphor, approached from the other side, and for me that becomes more real than reality. Then you sense a feeling rather than saying, "Oh yeah, that's exactly like it looks." You actually feel the warmth of the color, you feel the blue in the sky, rather than saying, "Oh, that's the blue that it actually is." In a way it's the same thing, the same way I relate to Sadie's films, but it's from the exact opposite side.
- **BJ:** But the sense of textuality in your early work is the same, because you named your early films 8 1/2 x 11 or 11 x 14 to suggest that they're products of a writer's imagination. And yet the textual, writerly aspect has to do with the way in which they're cut up and reshuffled.
- JB: I should probably also say that even though my films, especially the earlier works, were known for this pristine photography and those kinds of qualities, I entered filmmaking very much the way Sadie did, with getting the camera I could afford, which was a spring-wind Bolex camera. And I used it on a cheap tripod, and I was just careful and crafted images. So I was using really low-end equipment, and I still use that equipment. I use a motor on it now rather than spring-wind, except this last film — I did spring-wind again. So I like staying at that place where I don't have to worry about the technology. I have complete control over it, and there's more than enough to do with that kind of equipment.
- **BJ:** What about you, Sadie? You're at a crossroads now. You've worked for how many years with Pixelvision?
- SB: I don't know, three years, four. I can't keep track. It's gone fast.
- **BJ:** Where do you want to go in terms of . . .
- SB: Well, I definitely know that money and all kinds of equipment don't buy ideas. I know that just from watching Hollywood movies my whole life growing up. So that's not what I'm searching for at all. I totally love how film looks; I think it's really beautiful. At this point in my life, I can do that. So that's what I want to do, if I can afford to do it. But I'm still going to be shooting in Pixel and in Hi-8, Super-8, and surveillance cameras, and using found footage. I want to collage a whole bunch of stuff together and not limit myself to any one thing. Maybe in the end I won't put it onto film; maybe I'll transfer everything to video. I'm not going to hold myself down to any one thing because it's a process. And each step of the way I figure out what I don't want, and I kind of clear that away, and then I figure it out; I get closer and closer to what I do want. So I'm just going to keep shooting and shooting and shooting until I have something.
- JB: The other day I was thinking about how film, and video certainly, has grown up too quickly compared to the other arts. Painting and sculpture stayed pure for thousands and thousands of years before people started messing with it. But sound was added to film after thirty years, or forty years at the most, and narrative was introduced almost immediately. Because of that, we really haven't exhausted the possibilities of what one can do with an image on film or video. Looking ahead to all these technologies to solve our problems or to give us better art, that's interesting to me, but at this point I'm much more interested in going back to image making itself, to the pure image to re-investigate those variables that were so quickly passed by in getting to today's dominant narrative cinema and beyond.
- **SB:** To get to the moon.
- JB: (Laughter) Yeah, to get to the moon and to virtual reality and who knows where else. Which is fine to dabble in that stuff, and I'm sure there'll be wonderful works made in those mediums, but I think there's

just as much excitement to look back as to look ahead. I might sound like I'm an old man, but I really believe in this, and I'm not being nostalgic here.

- **BJ:** Is that heightened at all by being at Cal Arts where there's a great focus on . . .
- **JB:** I mean there are people always talking about this future, and maybe I'm such a reactionary that I always say "wait a minute," and that I can't agree with anybody that this is an answer to anything. I totally agree with Sadie. You can't buy or construct ideas just out of technology itself. You have to be thinking and it has to come from — I think all good work really comes from — within, and what tools you use is up to you.
- **SB:** Yeah, and that's the scary thing. We know how to get to the moon, but we know very little about what's going on inside our own body and what we feel. That's what's really important, that's where your passion is. And when you can relate to yourself and understand yourself, then you deal with yourself. Our culture is so involved in getting somewhere quick. What happens when we get there and we're all totally fucked up? Like, you know, what pleasures are going to be left? We're all going to be stuck on the moon together and wanting to kill each other.
- BJ: So you don't feel you're locked into a technology that's alien from you in working in video or working in electronic media?
- **SB:** No, I'm really comfortable in front of the camera. The stuff that's going to be weird is working with other people because it's not the medium necessarily, because I feel really good with it. It's just taking that outside of a very safe environment — just me and the camera. Still, I'm going to do a lot of very intimate . . . — where it's just me and two other characters, and that's it.
- BJ: It may be strange to think of yourself as a performer or a character in your own work, but you are the principal character in so much of it. And you're extremely skillful. There are moments where, literally, just the movement of your eyelashes will suggest an emotional response to the information we may have read in your text or something that's happened within the tape. In fact, you work in extreme close-up, and it's very small gestures that register very powerfully, given the technology that you're using. How did you develop this way of working?
- SB: Well, for one, it's the camera, because it's pixilated. So the further you get away, the more you see the actual squares. I think it just works well close up and with high lighting. Plus I was filming everything myself, so I could only get as far as my arm could reach. So that's about as far as I would get. Everything would be the lines, the lighting, just be really beautiful when you shoot it really close up. But I think that's something that will change when I start using video and film and stuff and I get to go outside more. Because I also really like landscape and big long shots. My style and things that I like are going to develop and change as I do and the technologies that I have and the opportunities that I have. The Pixel camera can't do big outside shots. It just doesn't do it. You can't even see what it is because it's so pixilated.
- JB: What Bruce is saying is that you have this uncanny way of being able to turn your face into something or make a gesture with the side of your mouth.
- **SB:** I know where that comes from. It's from my mother! (Laughter) I was noticing that when I came home. My mom speaks completely with her face. When she was mad at me when I was a kid, she didn't have to yell at me and tell me to go to my room. She just had this look. My grandmother's like that, too. It's just like this thing that runs in my family. Plus when I was a kid, I would sit in front of the mirror for hours just being all these weird characters and totally using my face to express myself.
- **JB:** You've learned how to use it very economically now. That's what's so powerful.
- **SB:** What do you mean, "economically"?
- JB: That you can express so much with a small gesture or look, that you don't really mug at the camera. Although you even get away with doing that in the shot where you're in front of the American flag. It's complete mugging, which you don't do in any of the other films.
- **SB:** It was the wig. It was the long blonde wig.
- **JB:** Somehow you get away with that even. (Laughter)
- BJ: I'm going to segue into the theme of loneliness and being isolated. In Sadie's work it's clearly there in that you're in a room, and Sadie's all that's there — her thoughts and ideas and her writing. What's surprising

in your film, Jim — well, a lot of your work is thin on the human figure. There are very few images that stand out in your work that are filled with people. But this new film, what seems so astounding is that you can travel completely around the country, you can go thirteen thousand plus miles, and yet for the duration of the film there are only a handful of people that you ever encounter. I wonder if it's more than just happenstance, if it's a kind of metaphor for the position of the artist, or where you are in your life now, or what film can do in terms of your own self-analysis.

- JB: I obviously planned to do landscape shots void of people. When you travel around the country, obviously there are many people. I went out of my way to do landscapes without people. I wanted to present a romantic notion of America through its landscape and talk about America through its physical beauty, to show the potential that this land had to develop a civilization upon it. And to show it that way, kind of naked, without the imposition of humans. And then, even though you said there's just a handful of people in the film, actually the count is sixty. There are sixty people in the film, which is a lot of people for me, but they are all presented as portraitures, not really connected to the landscape. They're friends and acquaintances that I met on the trip from the year before.
- **SB:** And also that you've known for years. You didn't just meet them the year before.
- JB: Yeah. And family and my mother and my daughter, etc. Yes, the idea was to then present them in a portrait that would be very reminiscent of a snapshot, but to do it in real time on film that would somewhat present who the person was very subtly, through the way they positioned themselves in front of the camera, how they acted in front of the camera. Now, if you know the people, of course you see more of them in that positioning than if you don't. But even if you don't know them, I think you can read this person differently than that person, just because of the way they stand and where they are in the frame and what's in the background. And you get this kind of subtle reading of them. It may not be a totally accurate reading, but at least it's a reading of people isolated outside of the landscape. I purposely kept the portraits and the landscape shots separate throughout the film. It is the text that runs through the bottom of the frame that connects the people to the landscape. The text becomes the social landscape for the film. All the emotion, all the political meaning, everything pretty much comes from the text itself. And it isn't a romantic reading of America. It's what I tried to find as an accurate reading of America, and as honest as I could be, and to try to really speak to myself about how I felt about my past. The trip was very much about driving into the past and circling around what I had been through, where I had lived, what I remembered. Kind of driving through memory in a way.
- **SB:** Something I was thinking about is that, in a lot of ways, the things that we're dealing with are mostly the same thing, except just in totally different ways. I mean, I use myself and my bedroom, and everything is the internal, inside world. And you — it's still like a diary. Especially your last film is a total diary of your life, where you're going, and it's all outside — like the landscape, all the people that you've known for your life. And then also, along the bottom, it's what you're feeling, like your diary of all that. It's really quite similar.
- JB: No, they are, and it was fun showing our work together. It made that very apparent. And yet, Sadie, I think has developed a film style in spite of my work. I think it's — she says it's basically informed by MTV. I don't mean that as a derogatory term, but I think I'd even go further to say that it's really informed by commercials on television where they use text and image and sound-over and tell a story quite quickly and concisely and get to the point. And, in fact, sometimes commercials are the best part of television for me. I'm not saying that you're making commercials in your work. You're taking that model and actually saying something important about you and your life and how you see the world. You're not selling a product:, you're revealing your soul. You're putting yourself on the line. You're doing something much more . . .
- **SB:** Well, I'm not selling candy bars.
- **JB:** But it's interesting that those kinds of techniques are very powerful and very useful.
- **SB:** On television, my generation well there's cable TV, public access, music videos. You have like seventy channels to choose from. When I was little kid, there were four channels. There's really been a revolution. Basically it's being used to brainwash everyone and control everyone. And yet at the same time, the thing that I hated the most is that I didn't see any images that represented me or anything that I can identify with —not just because I'm gay. I have a lot of straight friends, and television's not real. It doesn't really speak to very many people at all. It's entertainment; it's not necessarily real. At the same time, it's really influenced the way I work, the way I see the world. If you don't get to travel or see other places, television is the world. It's all that you have to understand anything that's going on.

- BJ: You know, one thing your two very different bodies of work do share is this deep suspicion of the mainstream, be it television or cinema. Even so much so that there's very little use of sync sound in any of your films, Jim. And there's an attempt, given the nature of your medium, which is sound and picture on the same piece of material, to subvert the use of sync sound in many of your video pieces, Sadie. There seems to be a desire to opt out of the main technique or device that drives feature films or drives commercial television — which is people talking, in the frame, in some sort of live sound.
- **SB:** Well, I like to work just as much visually. I feel like I'm telling a story visually more than I am telling it with what I'm saying in a lot of ways. Like you were saying, there's two films in one in some respects.
- BJ: In your early tapes you actually often frame yourself so that, even though you're talking, we can't see your mouth. We only see a section of your face. So it's as if it's voice-over.
- **SB:** A lot of times it is, too. A lot of times I dub the sound in.
- **JB:** It's a funny thing, though, because I think Sadie and I both have this love/hate relationship with television.
- **SB:** Cause we watch it a lot.
- JB: We enjoy watching it, and we enjoy making fun of it at the same time. I shouldn't speak for you, but I know, myself, I really haven't developed a style against that work because I actually do enjoy watching television. So the way of working I have isn't a reaction really to Hollywood or television, but it's a desire, a more positive desire, to develop a new visual language for myself and hopefully for other people, so you look at things differently. But it isn't a negative response, because I don't want to be working against something. I want to be working towards something. For me it's funny to even compare my kind of narrative to Hollywood narrative. It's like asking somebody — an artist — to talk about an accountant because they both use pencils. I feel like I'm so far away from that. But I don't want to make a value judgment and say, "This is bad and this is good," although I can put a value judgment on the kind of imaging they do and the kinds of things they try to say. But as far as styles, that's just another way of working.
- BJ: Can I ask you, Sadie, what governs your selection of music, because you're not playing what most people would assume the music of your own generation would be. You play Billie Holliday or jazz records from the fifties or that earlier form of punk rock from the sixties. It's such an interesting cultural mix.
- JB: And even Dolly Parton.
- **SB:** Oh, well that's the first concert I ever went to, so I had to pay her my respects. I've always loved music. I have a lot of musicians in my family. My dad always had a good record collection; my uncle worked in a record store, so I'd get really good records for Christmas. The neighborhood that I lived in, when you walked out on the porch, you'd hear Puerto Rican music coming out of some of these car stereos, hip hop coming out of somebody's stereo. I watched MTV a lot when I was a kid. I was into like break dancing. I really liked all kinds of music when I was growing up. I like anything from country to, you know . . .
- **JB:** Also, you learned to be a junker at an early age, going to junk stores.
- **SB:** Yeah, I'm really into going to junk stores and finding good steals.
- **JB:** It's a trait of white-trash America. (Laughter) And we gladly pass it on to anybody else.
- **SB:** I want to say one more thing about the music. Every song I ever heard is basically not every song, but most songs I heard growing up — was very geared toward heterosexual love, love between men and women. I like to take things that weren't meant to identify me at all and use them anyway, because you have to have an imagination about things or you'll go nuts. I feel like I reclaim them and make them for me, even though they weren't meant to be.
- BJ: Let me comment on something that was interesting that you said, Sadie, at your show. You were asked about your relationship with Sundance because you were there at the festival the year before this. And you actually said something that I had heard your father say, in a slightly different context but very much with the same intent, maybe eight or ten years ago when he had come back from the IFP Market in New York and felt that it wasn't really about him. That when people were using the term "independent," they were really speaking in a kind of duplicitous way. They were coopting the energy and vitality of that movement. And you said that you basically felt the same way, that you questioned what someone could mean by "independent"

being a two-million-dollar feature. What is it that makes that world, which so many people your age would be absolutely clawing their way toward, really not right for you?

- **SB:** Because I've never felt, I mean, they've never spoken for me; I've never felt that I could identify with them. So suddenly that they are trying to identify with me — it's like there's no trust at all for that whole environment. I just totally have a different value system completely. I mean there were wheels and deals going on and big, elaborate luncheons with all of this food. And I just wished I was back on Booth Street with my dog and my mom, and I felt alienated. I said, "What am I doing here? I have a forty-dollar camera."
- **BJ:** Where do you want to be in three years? What do you want to be doing?
- SB: I don't know. I don't look that far ahead. Really right now I'm trying to center myself and just take each step at a time and not — I have no idea. Right now I'm really trying to step back a little bit because I feel like since I was fifteen, I've been sucked out of my bedroom and in kind of like this vacuum and then spit out in this particular point in time where I have all these decisions and different places I can go. And I don't really know if I want to be a filmmaker, if that's really what I want to do as a career. I kind of feel like I'm going to do this film, and I'm going to take some time and just figure out who I am, because this whole thing has been so quick, and I haven't had much time to really write, just to live a kind of normal life, whatever that is.
- BJ: And Jim, there's a kind of sense of having worked through problems in this film and obviously arriving back home again with these problems or issues resolved. Will you work in that deeply personal way again?
- **JB:** Well, let me correct you first. I arrived back with probably none of the problems resolved, but at least a first step to put them out on the table and with at least what I tried to present as an honest critique of those problems. Certainly some of the problems are between Sadie and me: me not living with her since she was one, her having certain anxieties about that, and me never really addressing those properly. And certainly us being together for this show is a start for us to maybe deal with those particular issues more directly than indirectly. But I'm also the kind of person who really lives inside myself a lot, and even though my films tend to give what's inside me, they're not really exploding outside quite as easily as Sadie's films do. So I would like to continue in that direction. I'm not sure where it's going to lead. If I have certain particular personal problems that I don't think relate to a more general problem out in the outside world, I don't think I want to deal with that issue in public.
- **SB:** But I think most personal issues do. It's kind of impossible for them not to.
- **JB:** If you're totally honest about them. Sadie and I were talking earlier about one problem with this kind of work: when people don't like this work you feel like they don't like you. It's a very difficult kind of work to produce because of that. We're not egoless human beings; we live out in the world, too. We need to get through the day somehow. I don't want to present either of us as a martyr in this situation, because everybody has lots of things going on inside of them that could be equally as interesting and valuable if it was produced and put out in front of people.
- **SB:** My work is so personal that I feel like every time I'm getting up I'm redefining what I am and what my work is about. I think I said this today. I always feel like I'm being pulled from different directions. Like the gay community — for them I'm a lesbian. So different places, I'm different things. I'm a girl. I'm white. I'm always kind of being like pulled different ways to say what I am, and that's something that really bothers me, because I don't feel like I'm any one of those things more than the other. That's something I'm trying to show in my work, how close all of those things are together. I'm not just the sexuality, I'm not just white, I'm not just a girl. I'm a whole being with all kinds of things going on. I don't know.
- **JB:** Should we quit?
- **BJ:** I think you're right.

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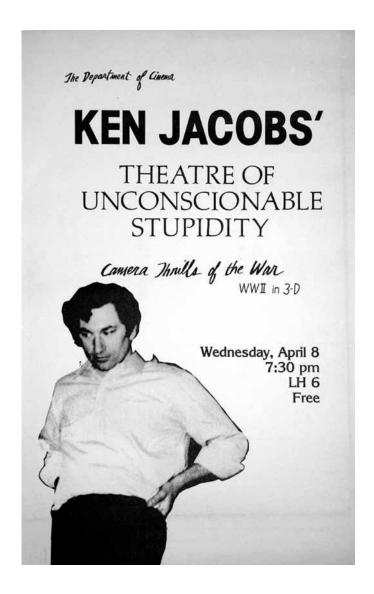
THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FORMS*

DAVID GATTEN AND FRED WORDEN IN CONVERSATION

EDITED BY WILLIAM ROSE

INCLUDING ANNOTATIONS FROM PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH KEN JACOBS AND FRED WORDEN.

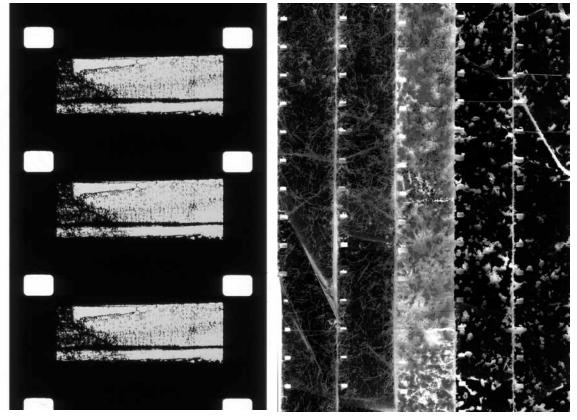




This edited conversation between filmmakers Fred Worden and David Gatten took place on July 22, 2011 at Gatten's studio in Salina, Colorado. It was motivated by ideas discussed in two previous conversations that took place in 1981 (with Worden, Ken and Flo Jacobs and Monique Ernst) and 2011 (with Worden, the Jacobs' and Ernie Gehr). Short excerpts from which have been used to annotate the text.

On March 17, 1981 Jacobs presented Ken Jacobs' Theater Of Unconscionable Stupidity Presents CAMERA THRILLS OF THE WAR at Collective for Living Cinema, New York. The 90-minute piece was a Nervous System¹ reworking of Camera Thrills of the War! [c.1945], a Castle Films home-movie release comprising of WWII combat footage. Jacobs' perceptual and aestheticized treatment of images of death prompted some critical audience responses and a review by Jim Hoberman in the Village Voice² which, citing the artist's reservations towards Stan Brakhage's 23rd Psalm Branch [1967]³, questioned the basis of Jacobs's new work. The day after the performance Jacobs sat down in New York with Fred Worden, who had seen the work, to discuss Jacobs' motives and the responses to it. I discovered an audio recording of their exchange amongst Jacobs' tapes in 2010 and invited Worden to hold a new conversation with Jacobs, 30-years on, to revisit a similar set of ideas broadly concerning politics and experimental film. They spoke in New York on July 3, 2011 and were joined by Ernie Gehr. Shortly after Worden invited David Gatten to listen to the previous tapes and talk to him separately about the issues raised and his response to them as an artist, teacher and contemporary in the field. — William Rose





TOP Ken Jacobs, Ken Jacobs' Theater Of Unconscionable Stupidity Presents CAMERA THRILLS OF THE WAR (1981).

David Gatten, ABOVE LEFT The Secret History of the Dividing Line (2002), ABOVE RIGHT What the Water Said, nos. 4-6 (2007). Frame enlargements, courtesy the artists.

FRED WORDEN: Let me go back and pick up on something that came up with Ken in '81. He'd shown Ken Jacobs' Theater Of Unconscionable Stupidity Presents CAMERA THRILLS OF THE WAR — which was a two-hour Nervous System reworking of WWII footage including scenes of airplanes being shot down and crashing into the ocean. Then there was a review by Hoberman in the Voice in which he raised the question about aestheticizing war and violence, which has always struck me as slightly hoary, but let's accept it as a question and let me ask you what you think about that. Do you think this is an important issue for artists to engage with? What are your responsibilities if you use a certain kind of pictorial material?

DAVID GATTEN: I think the responsibility would be to transform or illuminate it and to allow us to see it in a different way. Through formal gestures that could be editing, that could be the Nervous System apparatus — which is of course designed to make you experience things in a different way. His only responsibility is to make us see it differently. His responsibility is not to give us an answer about how to feel about it — that's the most boring thing you could possibly imagine.

1981

KEN JACOBS: What I'm examining is history. I'm learning about the mechanics of war and what it looks like. I'm teaching a course on war [Studies In Cinema And Society: Imaging War, SUNY Binghamton] and one of the things I said in the advertisement was, "It takes a lot of bullshit to win a war." This is one of the lumps of bullshit I'm studying and I don't think I'm doing it as a nostalgia freak, I'm doing it because I'm concerned. I see the way I was engineered when I was a child and I fear people being engineered into another righteous war now ... along contemporary lines but fundamentally no different. This is shocking in its unconscionable stupidity and its barbaric self-admittance. It's not embarrassed. But for us watching it, hopefully, this whole work should be an embarrassment. We should be embarrassed watching it, partly because of our capacity for finding it fascinating.

FW: There are always people that want to argue that our films are not political enough and question how we can make these abstractions in the face of what's going on in the world. Do you accept those basic arguments that any filmmaker has some responsibility to engage with the facts of the world and not go off into some kind of aesthetic abstraction?

¹ The 'Nervous System' is the name Jacobs gave to the live projection setup he developed and used between 1975-2000. It consists of two identical motion picture film prints on two 16mm or 35mm filmstrip projectors capable of advancing one frame at a time and freezing single images on screen. An exterior shutter, in the form of a spinning propeller positioned between the two projectors, is used to rapidly alternate between, and blend together, the two frames by interrupting the projections with imageless intervals.

The soundtrack to the work consisted of sections of the original voiceover to Camera Thrills of the War!, and concluded with a recording of Charles Ives singing They Are There! [1943]. The entire performance was preceded by a screening of the Superman cartoon Japoteurs [Dave Fleischer, 1942].

² Jim Hoberman, "Taking Stock," in Village Voice (March 18-24, 1981): "At two hours, the Jacobs piece is both subtle and demanding, perhaps too much so. In his most famous essay, Walter Benjamin cited the Futurists' aestheticization of war as the height of human self-alienation and the 'consummation of l'art pour l'art.' Jacobs is hardly unaware of these issues. He once levelled a similar criticism at Stan Brakhage's antiwar 23rd Psalm Branch and is, in fact, performing Camera Thrills as a benefit for the War Resisters League. But I wonder if Jacobs would ever run a less abstract snuff film through his apparatus. Ultimately, what's disturbing about Camera Thrills is that it's not disturbing enough."

³ Ken Jacobs, email to William Rose, 23 June 2013: "Stan and I did not speak for three-years after I rejected the purely aesthetic concerns of 23rd Psalm Branch. I had told him the film was a grand Beethoven-like structuring, but that he needed to remove himself from it. In light of what he was working with, showing, I thought he should not be telling us of his sufferings, perfectly in place in Flesh of Morning [1956]. I was not interested in achieving perfect objectivity regarding the naturalness of war, of genocide, given that it may not be so different from looking at flowers as they wilt. I think Stan took this as a betrayal of his holy pursuit, equanimity in face of all of existence; birth, death, of all

KJ: Not consistently, but often enough there's a kind of disembodied aesthetic endeavour which is unsatisfying to me because it's off in a world of its own. It's in the art world, which is meaningless to me. I'm not interested in this specialized occupation and being part of this cult of specialists. If the work itself is not about other issues I still need to feel that even if they've turned their attention away from history — there's some awareness of it. You see it in Mondrian for instance. There's awareness that he's making a certain kind of move in history and not simply making ingenious performances within the art world. In the age of specialization we're just becoming a certain kind of freak, and in the same way scientists work at their problems without understanding the consequences of what they're doing, artists are also achieving some kind of mutual building up of self-esteem by their activities and I think there's something inherently defeating about this. It's not that I want people to make works about war, but I would like to feel that I'm amongst people who are aware of a larger responsibility than simply moving the arts ahead. It becomes vain, especially at a time of terrific danger.

DG: My response would be that all films are political because all films exist within a larger context. One of the possible contexts that will be superimposed on any cultural production is a political one. There's no such thing as making an "apolitical" film. The most abstract film is still a political film. It may not be taking a position on a political issue of the day by seeking to inform, advocate or incite action — which I think is what people actually mean when they say a "political" film.

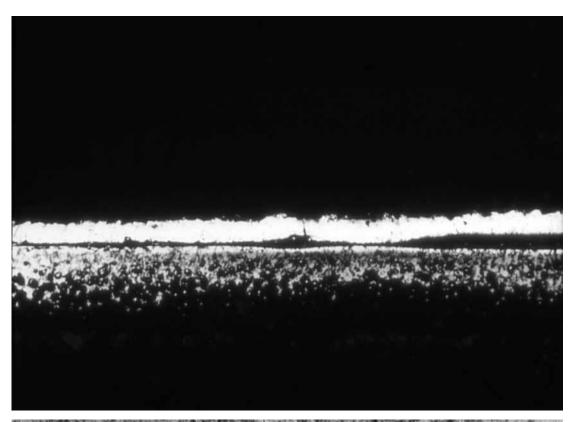
Propaganda is very good for getting people excited and moving people to take action. That's great, and there is a place for activist filmmaking. I grew up in a very politically active family; I worked on my first political campaign at the age of five and I'd worked on 40 by the time I graduated from high school because my mother ran political campaigns for a living. In my own cinema practice it's been fairly easy to separate out my action on political issues of the day — like who to vote for and what issues to contribute to — from what happens when I go into the studio. That's not to say I don't think about the political implications of the work I make — be it throwing film into the ocean and letting the ocean make the film [What the Water Said, Nos. 1-6 (1997-2007)], or dealing with seventeenth century texts in black and white silent films [Secret History of the Dividing Line, a True Account in Nine Parts (1996-)]. Those are also political but they have a different political function. I think for me, going to college in the early '90s, there was a lot of dialogue and instruction which said, "You can't do this ... you should do this ... if you're not engaging a political issue of the day then your work is retrograde or reactionary ... you are a white man and you sure as hell better not point a camera at a woman." These were the problems in what I was learning about. There's a power imbalance ... Laura Mulvey ... all of that was very important for me to move through and it's partly why I decided not to point cameras at people and make films about text. That really had a profound affect on me and I turned away from trying to wrestle with it.

FW: I'm thinking about when Ken performed XCXHXEXRXIXEXSX [1980] at the Flaherty [Film Seminar, 1992]. That was when the tempest was really at its peak. 4

DG: I remember reading about that when I started making films and I thought, "Jeez, I don't want any part of this." It seemed like a really silly argument to me. Someone would get exorcised for making XCXHXEXRXIXEXSX? I thought, "These people are crazy. They're not looking at the work he's done. He's not dealing with people, but with images of people. There are a couple of layers of remove here. He's not out photographing war planes crashing, he's using images." Ontologically there's a tremendous difference between a "snuff film"⁵ and what Ken did in that piece.

⁴ XCXHXEXRXIXEXSX (1980) is a Nervous System reworking of a c.1920 short pornographic film. Following his presentation of the work at the Flaherty Film Seminar in 1992, Jacobs was taken to task by some members of the audience for what they perceived as a misuse of the original film material. See Scott MacDonald, "Ken Jacobs and the Robert Flaherty Seminar," in Optic Antics: The Cinema of Ken Jacobs (2011), pp. 175.

⁵ See Hoberman footnote 3.





TOP David Gatten, The Secret History of the Dividing Line~(2002).ABOVE Ken Jacobs, XCXHXEXRXIXEXSX (1980). Frame enlargements, courtesy the artists.



Ken Jacobs, Capitalism: Child Labor (2007), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist.

FW: Ken makes the point during our dialogue that it's not only a consideration of war but of war films. He grew up with the propagandistic use of films and newsreels and he was fighting back - or trying to balance it in his life.

DG: Of course, this is what we have to do. We have things in our heads, we externalize them through a medium in which we have some facility, and then it becomes a work which is open for discussion. That seems like a very healthy response. Similarly I think about Brakhage's 23rd Psalm Branch which was dealing with the Vietnam War with images from WWII.

FW: Right, and I think that's a powerful anti-war film, even though Stan's view of things was that war was part of the natural ecology of human life. In some ways he wasn't adamantly against war, he accepted it.

DG: But then as a viewer one could respond with horror and feel that it might be inevitable but that doesn't make it good and we should certainly try to minimize it. Now does his film change the world? I don't know.

FW: I think one could make the case that a film, or any artwork, is part of a larger fabric that's going on in a particular time period.

DG: Yes. It's not just you the artist; you are part of a conversation and if the conversation gets big enough that does change things.

FW: It took years to look back and see that the whole protest movement did finally stop the Vietnam War. It took years of making these arguments — but in the end this slow heaving of history went our way.

There's another side to this that I didn't get into with Ken which is that I think his films embody this two-sided coin. He said that most of what he's doing now are, "Just aesthetic developments." But I don't think that's true. In Capitalism: Child Labor [2006], or any of the Nervous System performances, on the one hand he uses image material that's historical and engaging with the facts of the world, but he abstracts it through perceptual transformations. One might see those as incompatible. I always feel — and I remember this about Camera Thrills — that in a two-hour Nervous System performance — when you're

an hour and a half in you're not sitting there thinking, "Gee that poor pilot's getting fucked," because he's taking you to this other perceptual realm, and in fact if one stays rooted in the representational content of the imagery — and this also applies to Capitalism: Child Labor — you're not really going to attend to this other thing because I don't think your brain can be in both places. Or at least it would be a real drag on the perceptual experience to be attending to this thought about how terrible child labor is. You might start with that thought and come back to it on occasion because it never goes away, but somehow the film moves you off that into something else. I think you actually have to forget the political aspect to go with aesthetic experience — you have to put it aside.

1981

KJ: Only by taking it to this aesthetic extreme is there the most consummation created. The title is a powerful clue. It's like holding with one hand and pushing with the other and that creates a problem.

DG: I think putting aside, rather than forgetting, because you absorb it and then you move on to see what else the work is offering and what it's saying about that through its perceptual gestures. Certainly in recollection, the two kinds of experiences can intermingle again and they don't interrupt each other.

1981

KJ: I see art as something you live. It's not above life and it's not a reflection on it. It's an encoding of experience — and not somebody else's experience — your experience. It's something that you go to that you experience. You live this thing and you learn from living. That's the way one learns through the senses and anything else ... but also the works of art I'm mostly interested in are for more than just the senses; they're for the senses and more, because we're not only the senses. All these things can operate in concert with each other in a much more complex way. That movie *Hart Of London* — that's what I look for goddamn it. That's what I need and that's what I expect because only that will keep me alive; only that is asking me to be a totality.

FW: I've always thought that art generally, and particularly experimental film, has the possibility to be political to the extent that there is such a possibility. It lies in messing around with how we see things as opposed to communicating an idea like "war is bad" or "capitalism is bad." I'd rather be shown that it's possible to see the world in some way that I hadn't understood I could see it, because that suggests everything is up for reinterpretation, re-formulation or remaking. As someone that makes abstract films this is my defense because I've been on the end of that argument of how I can do this stuff when the world's burning.

DG: There are many people making work that enact resistance to a homogenized way of seeing, and a homogenized way of seeing is incredibly dangerous politically because when we stop being able to see that's how we get dictators and atrocities — we either can't see or choose to look away. This refreshing of vision and perception — sound and image — is part of the project, one could say, of the avant-garde, experimental, underground film — to provide a point of resistance to a homogenized experience of images.

There are eco-systems on the planet that are doomed and the human race isn't going to be around for that much longer. We've destroyed many things and in 20-million years we'll hopefully be able to recover some of what we've done. The problem is too big but that's now a given. I'm hopeless about that, so all we can do is work with what we have left and hopefully enrich our lives and other people's.

FW: In front of an audience at the New York Film Festival, Ken said that he was watching this child swinging on a bar in the subway car and he thought to himself, "That's where I am now. I just find immediate pleasure in some activity that I can get involved with right here and now." People find ways to live in the world without being crushed by it. He's saying that he's without hope and just doing aesthetics



but when I asked him about Capitalism: Child Labor he said, "Well you got me there," which seemed to me an obvious continuity of Camera Thrills.

DG: I thought my work would make a difference more immediately and now I've come to terms with the fact that it's a much slower process. He may have thought Camera Thrills was going to wake everybody up, but now with Capitalism: Child Labor he's still engaged with the issue but knows it's not going to be a game change.

FW: That's an interesting point. When Ken, Ernie and I were talking about this we did ask whether, 30-years later, we were disappointed that things didn't happen the way we thought they would or should have. I can't believe that any of us really thought these films were going to change the world even then. Ernie said that we do this activity out of some kind of instinct or feeling for it, and part of that feeling is that it's not a completely absurd activity. Even though I don't think my films are going to change the world I don't accept that they're utterly meaningless either.

DG: There's a conversation, a community and a history. This work operated within a historical context and a contemporary context. We know there's a tremendous amount of interest and we know this work is going to

be relevant to people making work in the future. We're engaged in this activity and a conversation, and for better or worse it's a specialized discourse. Not everyone is immediately going to understand or want to understand this work but we're engaged in a conversation amongst artists, poets and painters and I don't think that's a bad thing.

FW: It doesn't need any justification beyond what you just described?

DG: It does not. I think it's very important for you to do work that you feel strongly about and that you move towards because you love it and are curious about it — that's your responsibility. Then you have other responsibilities as a person. As a citizen you should be speaking your mind or taking action about things that are done in your name.

2011

FW: Even though you may be hopeless, you as an artist have had an influence on a lot of people and that includes you as a person and the works themselves. There's a whole conglomeration of you-ness that's been an agent in the world. So I think it has had real political footing to the extent that it's possible to.

KJ: I appreciate that, and I can see that some of it is true, however, the people who control money and the military in the world are going headlong into disaster. Nothing's going to stop them. This stuff won't stop them. Therefore we are free to do whatever we want. It's vanity to think that anything we might do is going to do any good.

FW: Another objection I've had to certain arguments about political films in art contexts is that they're often preaching to the choir. To go and show a film to an experimental film audience about the evils of Bush or capitalism is totally risk free and it doesn't challenge anybody in any way — it's like our version of The Rush Limbaugh Show where we pat each other on the back and agree how terrible things are. I've



LEFT Ken Jacobs, Ken Jacobs' Theater Of Unconscionable Stupidity Presents CAMERA THRILLS OF THE WAR (1981). ABOVE Fred Worden, Amongst the Persuaded (2004). Frame enlargements, courtesy the artists.

always been interested in things that try to pick at our world by people inside it and I tried to do it with my film Amongst the Persuaded [2004]. That again could turn into an obnoxious self-righteous crusade. I think we've already established that we want the political component to be about freshening our way of seeing something and opening us up to a new take on something, so what are our presumptions or our assumptions that need to be looked at? Do we have any or are we so open minded that we're ... It's not just them right? It's us too.

1981

KJ: I know I can't teach anything to anybody. For me this thing is a meeting place for such as we. There are some things we have to be concerned with and this is time given over to that concern. It's not about it — it doesn't lecture about it. Somebody asked me why I did this and I said I wanted to create an opportunity for people who feel this way to grieve together.

I'm not trying to push anybody; it's simply expressing what's happening with me and what I'm concerned with. This kind of cry is how we communicate to each other and another person hears and interprets that cry and is possibly in sympathy with it and understands it. I think that also has some value.

DG: It's absolutely us, yes. One of the things I was trying to trace in the course was the responsibility to look at things, and by way of looking at things, attempt to bridge the gap between the self and some kind of other. We started out with Franju's Blood of the Beasts [1949], which appears to be a movie about slaughterhouses but is about much more. You see a horse come in, the spike goes into its head and the horse goes down. It's extremely painful to watch; you are watching animals die and be taken apart but you're also watching the people who do this on a daily basis. It's walled off and its ultimately a movie that says, "You'd better pay attention to things that are done in your name because today you may be looking away from the slaughter house but tomorrow you may be looking away from people being herded into the concentration camp." This is 1949 in France — you're definitely thinking about the Holocaust and what people looked away from and allowed to be done in their name in France, Germany and Poland.

We went from Blood of the Beasts to Night and Fog [1955], Hiroshima Mon Amour [1959], Muriel [1963] ... These are films that I think articulate an important political issue but they also enact their politics. Unlike Manufacturing Consent [1988] or a Michael Moore movie that simply talk about it, the form and the shape of the work is also engaged and connected to the issues it's discussing: memory, history, connections across cultural difference.

FW: That's an interesting concept — to find a form that is itself articulating, apart from whatever material is passing through it. This reminds me of the Structuralist Film movement that came out of England not our version, but Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice's. I was chafed a bit under Le Grice's position even though I liked him. I always thought there was a Sunday school aspect to it. It's like he was basically just critiquing the conventions of narrative cinema. They would talk about things like "spurious illusionism" as though we can't engage in fiction.

DG: Not just fiction — representation was to be interrogated and destroyed.

FW: That had a puritanism that I felt when I was at Sunday school, "You should not ... you must not ..."

DG: It was a set of rules as though it was a program to follow.

FW: It was very judgmental, but they were meant to be political films. One might reasonably ask — just as Ken and Ernie and I did looking back 30-years — did anything come out of the things we did or was it just something that happened for a period of time and then ended and it's on the historical shelf but it really doesn't have a bearing on us now. Do you think that had a meaningful impact?

DG: I wrestled with it. It was meaningful to me when I was trying to understand the history of this attempt to make serious images, but I felt like once I'd read the books — particularly Gidal's Materialist Film — if you followed this program to its conclusion, you actually couldn't make films. Everyone that tries to follow it is painted into a corner. It was far enough in the past for it to be historically interesting to me but it didn't have a tremendous bearing on what I was doing. I went to Brakhage, Frampton and Snow. I was interested in people that didn't seem to have answers and their work always seemed to be more about questions than about closing down possibilities.

FW: So you needed to see those films even though you yourself wouldn't make work like them — it's a nutrient you needed.

DG: Sure, because of one's responsibility to make work that is true to itself and the history of the medium. I needed to know the history of the medium and I felt like if I paid attention to those things and made work that I thought was internally coherent, participated in a contemporary conversation and was responsible to the history of cinema, then there weren't going to be any problems and I would have done what I needed to do [laughter]. That's what I had to be responsible to. So yes, I absolutely needed to know

FW: Thinking about your films, there are lots of different strands; you have a political side, you have a structural side, there's the lyrical abstraction, and there's always a feeling that you're rather deliberately taking up a structure.

DG: For me Agnes Martin is key because people look at her work and think, "minimalist," because it's grids, but she's actually an Abstract Expressionist.

"Is it lyrical, is it first person, is it structural cinema? What is it?" It's several of these things.

FW: Agnes Martin's rigor was a place to stage all the subtlety of her painting right?

DG: Yes. I'm always looking for some rigor in which to be expressive. I think we need strong, visible shapes and this is one of the places where I think my work enters into something political. We make the shapes visible as opposed to hiding them. Propaganda makes the medium invisible so that you're not troubled by the material and just flow with the emotion. I'm always interested in a visible and strong shape, and sometimes that's an absolutely rigid structure. There's room to play but we need this strong, visible container and shape. I like that!

FW: Form can sometimes take you beyond your expressive possibilities. It forces you into something that you might not get to if you were just going with your taste or following your interests. I've constantly struggled with it myself. We don't talk about that whole debate about structure and form like we used to in

the '70s. You're one of the few people that bring it up. I remember Brakhage making the argument that he didn't want anything that was rigid and mechanical and repetitive and Peter Kubelka said something like, "When you're building the Parthenon, you don't just put the column anywhere. It has to go where it has to go." [Laughter.]

DG: I've always liked lots of things. It was a rich viewing experience for me, a rich intellectual experience. In my own work, yes, there are films where every shot is 29-frames, and then there are films where there are no rules at all. If there's one thing that ties it together it's something to do with legibility, words and reading. It's not about structure versus expressivity. To me that's not the question. Reading, image and text; that's all it comes down to.

FW: Are there any aspects of the stuff you heard on those tapes that particularly interested you?

DG: I was in agreement with so much of what you were saying the whole time. I'm so lucky, in a way, that I already got these answers from history. I was taught things already.



David Gatten, *What the Water Said*, *nos.* **4-6** (2007), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist.

FW: You could come in at a higher level and you didn't have to go back. {Not a higher level, just a different place.} I think you probably did come in at a higher level.

DG: I'm not worried whether my films are political enough.

FW: I think a lot of the kind of issues and arguments that we had to push through in our period no longer have to be dealt with because one can look at the end result and go from there, which is the way it should be.

DG: There are other issues for me right now. I don't feel like I have to repeat history, but I'm trying to learn lessons from it, so I'm grateful in that way. I came into this when the community was established. There was a history, not just *Visionary Film* [P. Adams Sitney]. Scott MacDonald was starting to publish the interview books. So I came into this knowing that I was part of a tradition. I think this is a great time. One of the things I remember Stan saying shortly before he died is that now is the best time. There's more good work being made, audiences for it and places to show it.

—Thank you to David Gatten, Ken Jacobs, Fred Worden and Jim Hoberman.

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CATCHING WITH THE PRESENT

TWO TEXTS TO DEMONSTRATE THE 'FUTURE' IS BEHIND US

TOM SHERMAN

There has been a tremendous complication of the media environment over the past 35 years. The millennial period has ushered in increasing threats to individual privacy and identity. The 21st century, the proliferation of distributed authorship, and the continuous erosion of privacy have altered the way we think about creativity and imagination and the possibility of inventing the future. In terms of the future, we have hit the wall. The future seems to have reversed directions and is collapsing upon us.1 With developments in neuroscience, genetic engineering, and networked intelligence, we find it difficult to cope with the implications of the present, let alone imagine the future. Confusion and anxiety reigns. We're going backward, side-to-side, and forward at the same time. The future is a multidirectional concept. For all practical purposes, the 'future' is behind us.

To contribute to our sense of where we are today and how we got here, I offer two texts. The Disconnection Machine (2001) points out that no matter to how great our efforts to connect through networks, we tragically become more and more aware of the distance and isolation we are engineering. In the second text, Always Nice to be Recognized (2004) the fundamental, existential paradox of the need to be present and recognized is paired with the downside of such visibility. Cultures steeped in surveillance put forth extreme challenges to the imagination and the reinvention of self. Our growing awareness of how confining the telecom environment really is should give us pause as we continue to adapt to the demands of technological 'progress.'

Tom Sherman, June 17, 2013

The Disconnection Machine* (2001)

I've been working with this company for about six months. I used to go into the office but now I just go to work on the web. I go to work via my webcam. We use the channels they've given us. I'm not sure they're secure. I don't worry too much about security. It's an interesting situation, working on the web, where you can make a living in the privacy of your own home. I'm thankful I have this opportunity to work. All you have to do is log on and participate as much as you can. Stay on as long as possible. Be straightforward, make your contributions, create your own role. It's great because you can work your preferred hours in the privacy of your own home.

The CEO is totally wired. He's got lots of slogans, and leads by example. Everyone has to sign a disclosure agreement. There's one strict policy in place. A total transparency policy. In other words, when you sign onto the Web and you make your arrangements to meet people to do your thing, you know you're doing so in public in the sense that the rest of the company can and will be there to watch, and listen in. You can't afford to be self-conscious. It isn't about being liked or super-effective. It isn't competitive, in the normal sense. The CEO stresses that we should make a contribution that's important to us.

There's no dress code. There's no standard operational protocol. You can get loaded and still go to work, as long as you can still function. You don't work for the weekend with this company. We work all the time. It's different than the regular office situation. It's better.

There are only a few things that people do in offices. They're social. People try to work together for the good of the company. If you're in an effective, functional organization, your job is to keep it moving. You do what you can to keep it moving. I've been in this kind of situation plenty of times, where the main objective is to tweak and maintain, to keep the loose ends from proliferating. I've been there, but I get bored. The kind of companies I really like to work for are the one's that are failing. The companies where the employees are exhausted and paranoid. They know their days are numbered. You can assume a lot of responsibility quickly in a company like that. It's your role to shake things up, to take chances, to give the mess some order, to think how it might be completely different.

I like a lot of the people at work. I'm making tons of new friends. There are some very interesting people in our company. But sometimes it's hard to know how to act. The most difficult thing is figuring out who I should stay away from.

I don't know if this company is going to make it or not. It's pretty hard to tell. The paychecks are coming in, and they're coming on time. I worry because it's difficult to see if we're making any progress. We're building a huge system; it's a network with vast quantities of distributed memory, a system societal in scale. We're calling it the disconnection machine. We use the very best gear. We record every attempt at communication. Every time we connect, we make note of the device and network employed, the length of every conversation, and we document the nature of the information exchanged. By fixating on the actual means of our connectivity, we place an emphasis on distance and dislocation. Our fixation on the technology highlights the gaps between us.

I love working in the privacy of my own home. I enjoy putting out for the company at every waking moment. I'm happy there's no difference between being at work, and being really home. I like working when I'm half asleep. I do get tired of managing information all the time. Opening files and then putting things away. We spend our time structuring indexes, organizing, compiling banks of excessive memory. We use the very best gear. New gear keeps our morale high. We conform our behavior to the parameters of the latest software. I love capturing and saving things I really care about. But sometimes I feel like a damn cleric. I'm opening and closing windows, and moving files around and around. Transferring data from format to format. Opening and closing windows. Opening and closing files. The procedural redundancy gets me down, and I feel like I'm being immobilized by the weight of memory.

I was so exhausted the other day. I got in my car. I stopped at an intersection. The lights kept changing; the opposing traffic was sweeping by me. I was stuck at the longest stop light in the city. Time stood still. I was looking straight-ahead through the windshield — there were these beautiful white, puffy clouds on the horizon. When I was younger I used to see people and animals in the clouds. I used to see eyes, and ears, noses, and mouths. I'd see animals like my dog, or tigers and snakes, or my favorite toys. Sometimes I'd even see body parts. But now, when I look at clouds, they're just clouds.

I love this job because I can put the things I care about in files, and then show them to people later. When you work everyday, things build up. I pack my favorite things into massive stacks of memory. The only problem is when you put too many things in memory and play them back, they become tired and slow they become uninteresting. The memory becomes excessive and I feel like an accountant, an accountant of memory. Opening files, and closing files. Trying to remember where things are stored. When the weight of this accumulated memory starts to bring me down, I always remind myself that there's hope. There are always things I hope to capture later. It's important to keep a balance. It's about maintaining the balance between memory and hope.

Wait a minute. This is working — as a recruiting pitch, this is working far too well. I have to ask you why, if privacy is so important...people are always talking about message security and enacting laws to protect private information...well why, if privacy is so important...privacy is that space you need, that internal space you must maintain, where you can do important things that otherwise you wouldn't be able to get things accomplished. I'm wondering, if privacy is so important to you, then why do you take every opportunity to make superficial contact with others. You take every opportunity to escape from yourself. I know the world is a mess. I know it's tough. I know that underneath that cool demeanor, things are pretty messy inside. I know you're fragmented, scattered, hopelessly untogether, but must you conform to an engineered sense of personal integrity? It's a big responsibility to build a machine like this. Let's begin again...

We're working on a disconnection machine. We need people who are willing to deal with themselves inside. I bet you're the kind of people who sleep with your radios and televisions and stereos left on. We'll help you break the programmed sensibility. We'll break your reliance on connectivity, the false security mustered by your interaction with the world. Interactivity is overrated. When you're interacting with a system, you can't do anything else. Sure I'm tired of managing information all the time, and these people I work with. Do you think I like working with a bunch of crackpots? I ask myself if it is worth it every single day. It all depends on what you value. We measure success by measuring the light we share. The things we love are the things in between us. The computers, the cell phones, the light we share on our screens. I love watching my co-workers when they think they are all alone. They have such beautiful dead faces.

We're disconnected from nature. We're disconnected from technology. Our technology is incompatible with your technology. Our interests are incompatible with your interests. If you can't connect with what we're doing, we take it as a compliment.

I like to stay on-line after we've had our meetings, to watch. I love to watch. With this job there's no difference between being at work and being at home. Except at work, people often try too hard. I want to share my files with everyone, to distribute the things I really care about. I'd like to go for a walk on the beach right now. It's hard to believe I was at the shore only a few short months ago. It's not tangible at all anymore.

I was listening in on these people who were talking about memory disorders, something I know a lot about. Some people can't remember who they are, or where they are, or who they are talking to, or why. They try too hard and things go wrong. There's nothing worse than trying very hard to contact somebody, and to find it's not working. I was listening to this woman in the mall, and she kept asking when she was going to see her dead sister. I heard she was asking the same question for years. We try to strike a balance between memory and hope. When I look at these files of recorded nature, I try to go there.

The light we share, it's so beautiful. It's the light between us. Between every connection we make, there's the concrete distance between us, and the very real sense of dislocation. Sometimes, when I see their

beautiful dead faces, I think I've got that feeling, in my own face, on my skin, in the muscles below the surface. It must be the weight of the light. One thing I noticed about the people I work with, they like to be alone. That's why I like to work for this company, because we all get to work alone, together.

There's no standard operational protocol. There's no nine to five. You just make honest, direct contributions, to the disconnection machine.

It's hard to believe I was just at the shore a few months ago. I got to the point where I could leave all the gear behind. I wasn't even packing my cell. Now these files are running slower. The unwired earth is just a rock. It's dead, and uninteresting. Life on earth is an oxymoron. We're incompatible with technology. We're incompatible with nature. Our technology is incompatible with your technology. We've got a little joke we tell around the office. We like to say we're networking a certain level of depression. It's the things in between us we value. It's the networks, our computers, our phones, and the way we look on the screen. We love the light we share.

*Rewritten transcript from a spoken-word improvisation as part of a Nerve Theory performance at Elektra, Montreal, 2001.

ALWAYS NICE TO BE RECOGNIZED (2004)

The key to the future is privacy. Privacy is not just a territory to protect, it is the essence of our personal existence — a space that must be developed, expanded, and maintained. Information control systems, such as families, religions, schools, states, political parties, corporations, community-based organizations, will seek to define our private, psychological space, attempting to limit and conform our inner worlds. We must resist.

In the future our identities will continue to be shaped by communications technologies. The wireless, digital revolution of the late 20th century was only the beginning of a massive assault on private, individual autonomy. Creative, critical thinking is built on a foundation of imagination and unorthodoxy. Minds must continue to wander and ponder the inconceivable, and investigate the improper. If we muck around freely in the privacy of our own minds, we will frequent territory off-limits to others, and in the long run this internal exploration will help us to know who we are, and what we want, instinctively and intellectually. Connectivity with others is valuable as a means for sharing the bounty of our private worlds, but connectivity itself must be moderated, or the blood-life of privacy will be drained off.

The central issue lurking throughout these thoughts is the disadvantage of not having a private space to regroup or restructure within. Private space must be nurtured and protected, as privacy is an insurance policy against psychological and emotional incarceration. The work of artists will be increasingly important as they develop and expose their private worlds in broad daylight, for all to see.

Privacy is important because it allows us to pretend we are something, anything, we are not. It gives us the space we need to practice things we would like to be good at someday. Privacy makes us secure by letting us know we are very different than people think we are. We need privacy because it is the extra space we need to grow new 'parts,' as we are being used up and mangled everyday in the brutal, real world. We need a space where we can be true to ourselves, no matter what the consequences outside. There is so much compromise required outside.

The dangers with eroding privacy are the restrictions imposed on personal growth, including a lack of depth of analysis, limited critical perspective, and the evaporation of hard-core creativity (psychologicallyrooted, anti-social, self-sustaining creativity).

Because I know that people are listening to my inner voice, I cannot afford to feel the way I once did.

Never undervalue mental health. Value continuous, perpetual, personal growth. Societies are dynamic intermixes of individuals and social groups. A society is a mix of psychological states and social organizations.

In a healthy society individuals sometimes become organizations and organizations become individuals, and there are other such transformations. Information-seeking organizations categorize individuals for various levels of exploitation, and individuals actively seek damning information from and about the corporate environment.

Artists extend themselves by revealing explicitly defined psychological and social positions. As the information economy becomes more obviously based on private or personal information, as the spiritual engine of the economy is totally decentralized, to a cellular level, all individuals will have to become expert at managing the input and output of personal information.

The idea of building aggregate majorities of diverse minorities is important. Alliances with others must be fused with frequent communication bridging the gaps, splitting the differences. Redundant compromise can add up to a tedious culture that must be continuously challenged by the radical interventions of relative extremists. Social hybridity must not result in a dilution of its original, constituent components, but should spawn a new vitality based in recontextualized traditions and anomalous, a-historical trends. Without recognizable historical roots, hybridity will drift away from the reality of the street, turning in on itself in oscillating, wave-like patterns, inevitably heading for abstraction.

It is possible that more and more individuals will function like artists in terms of psychological extroversion. We will see the widespread return of impressionism. The distortion of normal visual and aural perception through a reduction of sensory information will become the norm. Let's call this "disnormalism." And there will be additive, expressionist tendencies where emotional tone spills out into the world coloring everything with melancholy, depression, and rage. Distortion, and hence abstraction, will rise against the explicitness of life under surveillance. There will be a need to reduce complexity, to discard needless detail, to uncover the essential forms and rhythms of the street and the mind. Many will learn how to read and write the most abstract code.

Will artists become scarce in societies governed by surveillance and psychosocial engineering? It may make less and less sense to externalize that which is better kept inside. Creativity may be driven far underground, into a wholly psychological domain. Or will the proliferation of digital tools result in a tremendous increase in the volume of art, to the extent that everyone will be part artist?

Information technology will encourage more and more people to externalize their private lives. Networked, web-based, on-line publishing, digital cameras and camcorders/non-linear editing systems, and sound packages galore, will continue to offer ubiquitous opportunities for the production and distribution of previously invisible material.

Wireless, networked technologies will encourage the exchange of inane information, previously kept private.

It will be hard to build momentum for change when every single gesture is exposed, and compromised by moderation.

So many people today, when told they are under surveillance in the war against terrorism, seem pleased to be scanned by facial recognition software. It is always nice to be recognized. They feel secure being part of the databank. They have nothing to hide.

This is in itself an existential dilemma, as many of us exist only in records of consumption, a trail of information transactions. I burn energy, and accumulate material possessions, and am totally wired, therefore I am.

When we say we have nothing to hide, we are submitting ourselves to a future of global totalitarianism.

I refuse to provide my image, or a brief profile of myself.

1 Before and After the I-Bomb: An Artist in the Information Environment, Tom Sherman, Banff Centre Press (Banff, Alberta), edited by Peggy Gale, 2002.

Nerve Theory: The Disconnection Machine, (Tom Sherman and Bernhard Loibner), Coyne Performing Arts Center, Le Moyne College, Syracuse, New York, Nov. 8, 2001.

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Nerve Theory: Always Nice to be Recognized, (Tom Sherman and Bernhard Loibner) on Kunstradio, the ORF, Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, national radio broadcast/Kunstradio webcast, February 1, 2004.

Nerve Theory: Always Nice to be Recognized (Tom Sherman and Bernhard Loibner; curated by Isabella Bordoni), on Kunstradio, the ORF, Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, national radio broadcast/Kunstradio webcast, November 4, 2012.

Tom Sherman is an artist and writer. He works in video, radio and live performance, and writes all manner of texts. Originally from Michigan, he immigrated to Toronto in 1972. He represented Canada at Venice Biennale in 1980. In 1983 the National Gallery of Canada mounted Cultural Engineering, a ten-year survey of his video, installations and writing. Since 1993 Sherman has frequently performed and recorded with Bernhard Loibner (Vienna) in the duo Nerve Theory. Sherman's interdisciplinary work has been featured in hundreds of international exhibitions, festivals, broadcast and Web venues, including the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art (New York), Musee d'art contemporain (Montreal), Documenta X (Kassel), Ars Electronica (Linz), Musee d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), LUX Cinema (London), Montevideo (Amsterdam), and In Video (Milan). Sherman received the Canada Council for the Art's Bell Canada Award for excellence in video art in 2003. In 2005 the Festival International des Film sur l'Art (Montreal) featured a retrospective of his video art (1978-2004). He received Canada's Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Art in 2010. Sherman is a Professor at Syracuse University, teaching video production and media history and theory in its Department of Transmedia. He currently splits his time between Syracuse, New York, and his Canadian home on the South Shore of Nova Scotia.

SECESSION FROM THE BROADCAST

THE INTERNET AND THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

GENE YOUNGBLOOD

The only thing you can control, and you must therefore control, is the imagery in your own mind. - Epictetus

 Summon the breathtaking image of the multitude pouring into streets and plazas around the world in millions to demonstrate against tyranny. Now imagine instead they're demanding a free and open Internet. The likelihood of that is almost zero, we would agree. But why is that? What would have to happen to make that utopian image reality? What insurgent algorithm would get us from here to there? That is the subject of this lecture.

It is said life isn't measured by the number of breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away. I don't have to tell you we're living at such a moment. A truly breathtaking historical moment that may literally take our breath away. We live in futures that have come to pass, in case you haven't noticed. Apocalypse and utopia. Apocalypse not expected so soon, utopia not expected at all.

Apocalypse: the ecological holocaust and the end of democracy, both driven by third stage capitalism and created by the institutions that were supposed to prevent them. For 40 years I have called this the global ecosocial crisis. We've known for at least that long that it presents a challenge of civilizational proportion — the challenge to create on the same scale as we can destroy. We always face that challenge. But the sheer scale of actual and potential destruction today is beyond anything humans have imagined — or can imagine, even as it unfolds before our eyes.

The crisis is radically nontrivial, and anything like an adequate response will require sustained creative conversation among the people of the world. No problem can be solved by the same awareness that created it, so the conversation must be open to everyone for the widest scale of awareness. The only counterforce equal to the scale of destruction is the scale at which all people can communicate. The problem is that we can't get to the problem because we can't get to each other.

For that we need a communication revolution, and the apparatus that could enable it is at hand, we all know. Utopia, in this context, is the technological possibility, and only the possibility, of a communication revolution. That's probably not how you think of utopia, as mere technical potential for something. Anyway, you probably think a communication revolution has already happened. I'll return to them.

Meanwhile, consider the breathtaking historical coincidence of, on one hand, the failure of democracy around the world even as the ecological holocaust races in slow motion toward its tipping points; and on the other hand, the simultaneous rise, as if on demand, of the one thing that might enable a worldwide effort to prevent crisis from becoming catastrophe. Or at least catastrophe not greater than it's already guaranteed to be.

^{1 &}quot;We must learn to create on the same scale as we can destroy" is the credo of Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz (1950 – 2013), visionary pioneers of telepresent social networking who influenced my life and my thinking profoundly. Sherrie coined the credo in 1979. This lecture is dedicated to her memory.

If the Internet didn't exist we'd have to invent it to even begin to imagine what creating at scale might mean. So thank God it's here. But there's a problem. The communication revolution can't be allowed to happen, because it's a mortal threat to the social controls that precipitated the ecosocial crisis in the first place.

The cultural component of those controls I call "the broadcast." It follows that secession from the broadcast — leaving the culture without leaving the country — is the necessary first step toward creating on the same scale as we can destroy. The breathtaking fact is that the Internet actually does enable secession at that scale, which is why its very existence throws civilization into crisis.

Secession from dominant culture at the scale now possible means the collapse of social control as we know it in liberal democracies. We want it to collapse because it drives the crisis, but that creates another crisis that compounds the apocalypse. The other crisis isn't loss of social control. Quite the contrary. It's the rise of the security and surveillance state with unprecedented powers of totalitarian control. I call it the panopticon — which is the second reason the Internet throws civilization into crisis.

 One thing is certain: the free and open public Internet we need to prevent tyranny and face the coming chaos will not exist unless the millennial generation rises up to demand it. That's an apocalyptic double bind, because we need a free and open Internet to cultivate the radical will to demand a free and open Internet. The double bind that the only prerequisite to freedom is freedom is the real apocalypse, not climate change.²

How are millennials to confront the tragic legacy we leave them? How can they inaugurate The Build for creative destruction of the world-system that imperils their future? That's the transcendent question of our time: which culture will define the Internet, the culture of death or the culture of freedom? It's a race between the drive-down and The Build, and there isn't much time.

I offer language because new words and new meanings for old words are essential for the new understandings and agreements that crisis of this magnitude demands. Words don't express what we think, they tell us what we think. Thought is made in the mouth. We need to think differently, so I try to speak differently.

Let's start with the broadcast. By the broadcast I mean all state media, their institutional infrastructure, their political economy, the culture they create, and the social control the culture serves through the socialization it administers. I'll repeat that and explain it:

The broadcast is all state media...

You would say corporate media, but let's be consistent: we live in a corporate state and corporate media are state media. That's been understood at least since the early 20th century. In a democracy, government must rely on corporate media instead of state ministries to disseminate state propaganda.

Corporate media are state media just as the private banking cartel known as the Federal Reserve is a state bank. They are state media just as Exxon Mobil is a state oil company. And we know that privatized state media are more effective than nationalized media precisely because they're not seen as state media. So never say corporate media. Always say state media when you're talking about that component of the broadcast. It's more than just media, so let's continue the definition: The broadcast is all state media...

their institutional infrastructure...

That's the corporations that operate them for the state, not the Fourth Estate.

their political economy...

That's their service to transnational corporate capitalism and the transnational ruling class. The owners of the wealth of nations.

the culture they create...

Consumer culture, which is anticulture. The culture nobody likes or wants except the most damaged Americanists among us. Actually, America doesn't have culture because culture is what nurtures people. and the social control the culture serves...

Social control in a democracy requires our unconscious collaboration in our oppression. It has to be that way. You either have overt totalitarianism or the people must oppress themselves. That's why Edward Bernays, the father of public relations, proposed in 1928 that mass mind control is the very essence of the democratic process. It's hardly a new idea. You can trace it to Plato. The people are the source of all power, so the oppressor's power must come from us with our consent.

The Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci famously called this cultural hegemony. A few years after Bernays, in the early 1930s, Gramsci made a crucial distinction between coercive and consensual hegemony. In consensual hegemony one class dominates another by gaining its active consent to be dominated. Walter Lippmann called it "manufacturing consent." Lippmann is also known for his dictum that the public must not be political actors, but "interested spectators of action." I call it the audience-

The audience-nation gives its consent to be dominated because it internalizes the values, the codes of conduct, and the worldview of the dominator class. That is, the audience-nation internalizes the logic of the system of domination. Self-oppression becomes common sense, and we give our spontaneous consent to the direction imposed upon life by the deceiving hegemon. It's the truism that we aren't held against our will; it's our will that holds us here. That none are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.

This is old stuff. I'm just reminding you it's the most important work we do in a democracy — collaborate with the dominators in the endless reproduction of their reality and of ourselves in its image. We're not aware we're doing it, and we don't necessarily feel oppressed. Cultural hegemony works by inner conditioning so it feels like freedom. The greatest success of propaganda is the belief there's no propaganda.

There's another name for this kind of social control: inverted totalitarianism, a powerful understanding from the historian Sheldon Wolin in his book *Democracy Incorporated*.

Wolin brings Gramsci's cultural hegemony into a sweeping analysis of political economic controls in the proto-fascist corporate states we know as liberal democracies.

Here's Sheldon Wolin: "Inverted totalitarianism is the political ascendency of corporate power in symbiotic relationship with state power. No longer confined to domestic private enterprise, corporate power evolves into a globalizing co-partnership with the state. There's a double transmutation: the corporation becomes more political, the state more market-oriented. Economics, historically subordinate to politics, now dominates politics. With this domination come forms of ruthlessness different from the classical forms of it."3

The co-partnership of American media and the state is a triumph of inverted totalitarianism. We're the showcase of how democracy can be managed without appearing to be suppressed. The American people are victims of the most successful psychological operation ever inflicted on a national population, the most sophisticated propaganda campaign any regime has ever deployed against its own people. So never say the media aren't doing their job. They are doing their job. We aren't doing ours. Their job is to make sure of that.

^{2 &}quot;The only prerequisite to freedom is freedom" comes from my friend Ted Zatlyn, a poet and philosopher whose wisdom has inspired me for many decades, starting with Expanded Cinema in 1969. It's from his poem Meditation on Meditation, July 2011.

³ Sheldon S. Wolin. Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

The social control the broadcast serves — I'm going on with the definition now — the social control they serve is based on controlling the social construction of realities. More accurately, the broadcast controls the contexts in which realities are socially constructed and culturally affirmed, as Herbert Marcuse would say.

I emphasize controlling the contexts in which that happens because control of context is control of reality. Context is everything. Everything is context, and the broadcast is the metacontext for everything. It has the power to define, for most people most of the time, the four basic dimensions of reality — existence, priorities, values, and relations. Existence (what's real and what's not), priorities (what's important and what's not), values (what's good or bad, right or wrong), and how they're related.

Who gets to define those things at politically relevant scale? Who's excluded from conversations that establish understandings and agreements at that scale? Because there's no power greater than that. Like all cultures, the broadcast is a technology of the self. Everything we think, feel, desire, and do (or don't do) results from our living in it. We are who we are — and therefore civilization is what it is — because we internalize those understandings and agreements. We become the place we live in. We are not born in the world. The world is born in us.

That's the last piece — the socialization the culture administers, through the broadcast's cultural hegemony. Its imperial speech is univocal: many channels, one voice. Many voices, one chorus. Many stories, one message. Many views of the world, one worldview.

We suffocate in the broadcast's oppressive singularity. We feel claustrophobic in its words. Only one purpose exists there, and it's not ours. All the wisdom of history tells us that wherever one voice speaks, wherever one story is told, is not a healthy place to be.

But it's not only the broadcast's singularity that's so important for social control; it's also the repetition of its stories. The essential repetition that stabilizes the culture. Repetition normalizes. It solidifies belief. What is repeated becomes truth; what is not repeated recedes from consciousness. So the stories of any culture must be told over and over again, never stopping. The chorus must repeat without end. Over and over again, endless and immersive repetition. We live in oceans of redundancy.

But there's a fatal flaw in this kind of social control: it only works if the audience-nation is listening. It only works if we're present and paying attention, participating in the conversation we call America. Our participation is more or less assured only if there are no alternative conversations of equal magnitude, no counter-narratives available at the same scale. Inverted totalitarianism works only if there's no exit from its cultural imperium, only if it's not possible for the audience-nation to stop being an audience, to secede from the broadcast, to leave the culture without leaving the country.

That has been structurally impossible until now, and if there's nowhere else to go, the audience-nation will stay in that dysfunctional parasocial relationship. We'll keep coming back for more exploitation and abuse. In fact, most of the audience-nation won't exit the imperium even when there is somewhere else to go — at least not at first. Witness the 24 million victims of Americanism who still deliver themselves to the broadcast every night at prime time for their training in consumer consciousness.

Some do it because they're Americanists. They've internalized the broadcast. The identification is complete. But most people are just immobilized in the sedimentation of habit. Socialization is never 100 percent, in fact not even close, and that's its weakness. Now the lack of alternatives, which used to compensate for that weakness, is removed. We're no longer held against our will. We're no longer trapped inside the signal. We're released from cognitive lockdown.

Which is to say that the cultural arm of social control in America — the cultural arm of control, there are other kinds of course — is now based exclusively on a mass identification that's not enforceable. The very existence of this apparatus that enables millions to systematically dis-identify with the American Imaginary, to willfully estrange ourselves from the master signifier — that's a new menace to social control.

It's jaw-dropping to realize what a house of cards the imperium has become, how tenuous the base for social control is in America today, how unsound are its moorings, how precariously it rests on a gamble that the audience-nation won't change its mind. Well, maybe we won't. But the possibility is there at alarming scale, and exactly what the dominators can do about it is far from obvious.

I've explained the components of the broadcast individually; what's important is how they're connected. So let's do a thought experiment. Let's go through the TV like Alice down the rabbit hole, into what we might call the broadcast's deep ecology. What's behind the screen?

The first thing we encounter, I already said, is its institutional infrastructure — the corporations that operate the broadcast for the state, with their global web of interlocked boards of directors. A board member of a media corporation sits on the boards of several entirely different corporations, each of whose members sit on multiple other boards, whose members sit on....and on endlessly, encircling the planet. It's a regime of global censorship, a private regulatory power that disciplines state media to not compromise the interests of their corporate owners and to keep the world safe for capitalism.

Thirty years ago, in his book The Media Monopoly, the distinguished Washington Post editor Ben Bagdikian called this the endless chain.⁵ That's an iconic figure if there ever was one. So let's follow the endless chain to the next level — the broadcast's political economy. That is, to what capitalism has become in its third stage. The three stages, across 500 years, are mercantile, national corporate and transnational corporate — which is promoted around the world as democracy. So, let's take a look at democracy, the most utopian of all dreams.

■ There are two democracies — utopian democracy, with a small "d," the one we all want, the one the founding fathers supposedly created, and the one Americanists still think they live in. Then there's actually existing democracy, with a capital "D," capitalist Democracy, the one that defeated the American experiment.

You have to be blinded by the broadcast not to realize America finally failed, as some say it was always intended to do. They say the "great experiment" was never aimed at self-government and individual freedom; it was aimed at managing democracy. Making the world safe for democracy meant that democracy had to be safe for the world. Its revolutionary potential had to be hollowed out. That was accomplished at the beginning, in the very design of the system. The great experiment in managing democracy has been an unqualified success. We live today in democracy's simulacrum. It's called polyarchy.⁶

^{4 &}quot;Technology of the self" is from Michel Foucault's critique of power relations. It refers to ways people present and police their "selves" (or, as theorists put it, how subjects constitute themselves) within systems of power (discourses) that enable and constrain what Foucault called "the care of the self." See, e.g., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault. University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

⁵ Ben H. Bagdikian. The Media Monopoly. Boston: Boston Press, 1983.

⁶ The political scientist Robert A. Dahl introduced the term "polyarchy" (as opposed to monarchy) in 1972 to distinguish democracy from the American form of government, which is formal, not actual, democracy. In a democracy, power is vested in the people. But voting against the interests of power must not be possible; democracy must be managed to preserve elite rule. Polyarchy is the combination of elite decision-making and public ratification. "The citizenry is reduced to an electorate," writes Sheldon Wolin," akin to an automatic response system, whose role is to validate elite candidates. Citizens aren't mobilized, we're just periodically excited...Inverted totalitarianism doesn't want or need active citizens, only periodic ones. It needs a citizenry on call." For an analysis of polyarchy at transnational scale, see Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US intervention, and Hegemony, by William I. Robinson (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

It's not the American empire that has failed, at least not yet. I mean, you hear that said, but I'm with Noam Chomsky and Michael Parenti — it's not the empire that has failed, it's the republic. We live in the new feudalism, ruled by a plutocratic oligarchy. The writer Arundhati Roy puts it this way: "Democracy has been used up, hollowed out, emptied of meaning. Its institutions have metastasized into something dangerous. Democracy and the free market have fused into a single predatory organism that revolves entirely around consolidating power and maximizing profit."7

The endless chain links the broadcast's political economy to the oligopoly of private tyrannies that collaborate in world domination — the World Bank-IMF-WTO-Wall Street-complex that contains the military-industrial complex. They're all united in the project of capitalist globalization, where the endless chain becomes the chain of command in the iron triangle of military, business and politics — whose iron fists are now ungloved to enforce the stability they call democracy.

Our enchainment in the endless chain is reflected in the endless string of modifiers attached to the phrase "military-industrial complex." The string gets longer with our growing awareness of it: corporatefinancial-prison-educational-agricultural-pharmaceutical-media-congressional-judicial-surveillancemilitary-industrial complex...and so on endlessly, until the endless chain becomes the endless net of neoliberal globalization, the net in which predatory capital captures Earth and everything on it. Here the endless chain becomes a carbon chain that leads to the collapse of the supply chain, and of the entire ecosocial system.

■ The ecosocial system is the world-system,⁸ the integration of human and natural ecologies on a planetary scale. I use that phrase to emphasize the systemic nature of the ecosocial totality. To indicate that biosphere and civilization constitute a single planetary structure. Hardly a new idea either, except now we're forced to take it seriously.

The integration of human and natural ecologies occurs at points of industrial production. Biotechnology takes it to the molecular level, so that the natural environment becomes a built environment, and, in the case of GMOs for example, organisms become ideological structures. The ultimate expression of what Jürgen Habermas calls capitalist colonization of the lifeworld.9

Nanotechnology extends the integration to the inorganic world, transforming material reality in ways that are now unimaginable. We know one thing: the transmutation of the physical world is apocalyptically dangerous if it's guided by the kind of people who now rule the world.

That returns us to the apocalypse, where every component of the global ecosocial system, on both sides, the human and the natural (as if we aren't natural), is in gradual but unrelenting disintegration. The steady slow motion advance of planetary heating, the energy, food, and water crises, mass extinctions, ocean dead zones, arctic meltdown, overpopulation, mega-urbanization and the pollution of everything...on and on.

The rapacious capitalism that drives all this has no country, no political loyalties as such, and only one purpose — to make more of itself. That's why Karl Marx called it "a machine for demolishing limits." We're up against ecosocial limits wherever we look, but the self-propelling circulation of capital recognizes no limitation. It's a siege engine that must bear down on whomever or whatever is in its path, charging ahead recklessly in its suicidal impulsion to accumulate.

And now capitalism seems to have entered its catabolic phase, closer than ever to cannibalizing itself and its host, taking us all down with it. Consider the supreme irony here: for capitalism the end of growth is death, but now so is continued growth. Growth and its opposite are both death for capitalism. The only thing you can create top down is a hole.

We used to say it was easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Now we do imagine the end of capitalism by imagining the end of the world. The end of history is replaced by the

end of the future. And since the globalization of capital is synonymous with democracy promotion around the world, we might wonder, along with Arundhati Roy, whether capitalist democracy is the endgame of the human race.

But the endless chain doesn't stop at that potentially terminal juncture. It loops back in a ruinous closure to become the chain in the brain. A circle returns us to where we began, to ourselves, carriers of the culture, sitting there in front of that screen gazing stupefied at the broadcast, endlessly reproducing ourselves in its image. The culture is us. We are the broadcast. Our minds are colonized. Hence the familiar saying that Big Brother is not watching us, Big Brother is us watching, collaborating in our oppression.

Given what's behind that screen, I think we can say legitimately that the collaboration is an act of mutually assisted double suicide with planetary ecocide as collateral damage. That's why allowing your gaze to fall upon that screen or those pages even for a second is a betrayal of us all. I'll be clear: to allow your gaze to fall upon the Daily Show or the New York Times in their context is complicity in potentially terminal crimes against humanity and the rest of the natural world.

From all this we can draw only one conclusion: get the hell out of this culture as fast as you can and never look back. My point is that for the first time in human history we can actually do that on a massive scale. Millions of us can secede from the broadcast right now if we desire it. Only our lack of radical will prevents us from committing that ultimate act of civil disobedience, leaving the culture without leaving the country.

 The ecological holocaust and the crisis of democracy are radical systemic breakdowns that demand radical response — transformation at the root. This is recognized around the world. Unless you live exclusively in the broadcast, you hear everywhere today the call for fundamental change, for transformation at the root. That's what radical means — from the Latin radix, root. And that's all it means. It doesn't mean extreme. Of course it has to be equated with extremism for social control. The last thing they want is people looking at root causes.

Radical change requires radical will — the will to transform the root — and the institutions that defeated democracy and created the planetary holocaust don't have radical will. They have only political will. Political will wants to maintain the status quo, radical will wants to transform it. Governments and corporations are incapable of radical will. They have no power to transform the root of their own existence.

Only the people can do that. Radical will belongs only to the people. And we'd better be ready to mobilize it, because fundamental change is never achieved democratically. It's accomplished only by force — the general strike, the tax revolt - including violent force or the credible threat of it. It's the truism that freedom isn't free; that liberties aren't given, they're taken; that rights aren't granted, they're won.

⁷ Arundhati Roy. Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009.

⁸ My hyphenation of "world-system" is not a reference to "world-systems theory" which arose in the 1970s through the work of Samuel Wallerstein, with its emphasis on the interaction of "core" and "periphery" nationstates. Contemporary globalization theory separates itself from that tradition by removing the hyphen from the capitalist world system it analyzes. Globalization studies acknowledge the core-periphery structure, but focus instead on forces that transcend nation-state interaction. Since I have no stake in that game, I feel free to hyphenate the phrase as a kind of unfashionable poetic license, saying: the world is a system and "the system" is a world. If you want to know how the world works, I highly recommend Critical Globalization Studies, edited by Richard P. Appelbaum and William I. Robinson (Routledge, 2005).

⁹ I take it as given that Jürgen Habermas' work on the public sphere and Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony are essential, even foundational, for any political economic critique of social control in general and the role of culture and media in particular. See Habermas' The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), and Gramsci's Prison Notebooks (1929-1935).

We know it couldn't be otherwise. The billionaire class isn't about to give up its wealth and power to become equal to everybody else just because the Great Beast says they should. Power concedes nothing without demand, and not even then. They prefer death to compromise; they'll darken the skies before they yield to democracy. As the economist John Kenneth Galbraith put it: "People of privilege will always risk their complete destruction rather than surrender any material part of their advantage."10

So we the people of the audience-nation face a challenge for which nothing in past experience has prepared us. We've known that for decades, so one might reasonably ask: are we really the ones we've been waiting for? Do we possess the radical will that can come only from us? There's not much evidence of it. America is one of the most depoliticized nations in the industrial world. We live in the land of look away. T. S. Eliot said the world ends not with a bang but a whimper. If only it would be so dramatic. Given the level of distraction in America, it's more likely the last instant of history will go by unnoticed.¹¹

 So it turns out that the ecosocial crisis is first and foremost a crisis of will and idea, a crisis of confidence and imagination — the expected result of our socialization in the broadcast. Which means creating on the same scale as we can destroy begins with recreating ourselves — resocializing ourselves to become the kind of people who would be capable of mobilizing radical will on the scale that's needed. How do we do that? How do we awaken the radical will that sleeps within us? The answer to this immemorial question is found in what I call the utopian myth of a communication revolution. Before I explain it, we need to understand a few things about utopia.

Dismiss at the outset any silly notion about utopia as some kind of ideal world, some kind of blueprint for bourgeois comfort, a map to happiness. To frame it that way is irresponsible and counter-revolutionary. It plays directly into social control. It says the desire called utopia — the desire for release from hierarchy,

and all it implies — is hopelessly naïve and not to be taken seriously.

Well, I think that's a betrayal of us all. It's collaboration in our oppression. Never frame utopian desire in a negative way. The only possible solutions to the crises we face are utopian solutions. If it isn't utopian, it isn't radical enough. So we've got to recuperate the word and re-imagine the idea. Begin by taking it seriously — utopia is not a place, it's a desire. The desire for radical change, for transformation at the root. That's something that can never be permitted by power, which is precisely why the call for it around the world has restored the radical figure of utopia to political currency.

Think back (those who are old enough) to May 1968 in Paris, and the famous slogan "be realistic, demand the impossible," where impossible meant not permitted. In other words, make a demand that, granted, would bring the system down. Like a free and open Internet.

In the years following those heady days of sixties counterculture, utopia lost its potency. It became discredited with the rise of cultural studies and identity politics, and their rejection of the cultural imperialism they thought utopia was about. So that, in 1999, in defiance of this trend, Russell Jacoby could publish his brave lament The End of Utopia, by which he meant the atrophy of radical will in our time.¹² But a mere six years later, in 2005, Fredric Jameson could proclaim in Archaeologies of the Future that utopia had regained its position at the leading edge of political thought. "It has recovered its vitality," he observed, "as a political slogan and a politically energizing perspective. It is taken seriously as a social and political project."13

Utopianism is political theory. It shifts the conversation about utopia away from content — an ideal world — to what's represented by the idea of utopia as such. Utopia is no longer understood as not possible because it's too ideal, but as not permitted because it's too radical. The struggle for freedom replaces the older utopian preoccupation with happiness.

 Utopia is hypothetical. It asks what if? It entices and beckons. It says, "COME GET ME." A population inflamed with radical will stands on the horizon and says to the audience-nation, "We're the distance between who you are and who you must become to meet the challenge. Come get us. What do you have to do to be us?"

In standard utopian narratives that little detail is ignored. We're just there in utopia, in this revolutionary world, with no explanation whatsoever of how we got there. The struggle is missing, and that's why standard utopias are so unconvincing. There's no ground truth under them. "The agency that realized the utopian condition is omitted," Jameson observes. "The narrative overleaps the revolution itself and posits an already existing post-revolutionary society. The axial moment, the break with history, the transformation into agency just isn't there."14

That conspicuous absence begs the question, and reminds us that utopia is always and only one thing the struggle for freedom at scale. Please understand: what's utopian is the scale of an impossible demand, not struggle per se. It's the utopian image I conjured at the beginning. That utopia is truly universal; to define it any other way is a betrayal of us all.

So, we've gone from utopia as not possible to utopia as not permitted. What's not permitted above all else is the forging of a utopian algorithm: the people must not see how to get from here to there. That brings us to the utopian myth of a communication revolution.

Recall that inverted totalitarianism is based on controlling the social construction of realities. A communication revolution inverts the way that's done, from top down to bottom up. It decentralizes and pluralizes the social construction of realities. I repeat: a communication revolution is the decentralization and pluralization of the social construction of realities. Period. That means it has nothing to do with technology. Of course it needs technology to happen, but the revolution isn't in the technology just as music isn't in a piano. Technology is never the driver, always the enabler. It's not technology that's transformative but the culture that forms around it. And as I said at the beginning, which culture defines the Internet is the great question of our time.

It was already the question in the early 1970s, when a set of technologies emerged in the United States that made a communication revolution theoretically possible — cable television, satellite distribution, portable video recording, videocassette and laserdisc publishing, and time-shared mainframe computing. With hindsight, we now recognize that mix as a kind of proto-Internet.

The early 1970s was also the beginning of the end of the counterculture moment in America. I had been at the center of it. From 1967 to 1970, I was associate editor and columnist for the Los Angeles Free Press, the first and largest of the underground newspapers that flourished in the U.S. at that time. So I was in a position to understand counterculture as a communication revolution. Not that you had to be in my position. I mean we were all living it. We were living the first and only communication revolution that has ever happened in the United States, brief and limited as it may have been.

¹⁰ John Kenneth Galbraith. The Age of Uncertainty. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.

¹¹ The wry proposition that the last instant of history will go by unnoticed is another gem from Ted Zatlyn, in an email on August 17, 2012, with the afterthought "As did the first."

¹² Russell Jacoby. The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture In An Age of Apathy. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

¹³ Fredric Jameson. Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions. London & New York: Verso, 2005.

¹⁴ Jameson, op. cit.

We left the culture without leaving the country in the 1960s, and our cohort inverted the social construction of realities. We did it on a politically threatening scale, so of course it had to be dealt with. Counterculture had to be neutralized and assimilated. That is, it had to be commodified. The commodification of outsiderdom had already begun in the 1950s — Rebel Without a Cause, The Wild One, Jack Kerouac on prime time television — so we in the sixties were de facto delivering ourselves directly to capital. The broadcast administered a mortal dose of publicity and the end was in sight.

It was a question of autonomy. Counterculture couldn't be sustained within shopping-counter culture. We couldn't live as a utopian enclave circumscribed by the imperial broadcast. We were looking for ways to remain in selfexile, and when technology emerged that could theoretically enable that at scale, we were alert to it. We saw it because we believed it, and we believed it because we were living it.

As the broadcast entered the dreamlife of the audience-nation, we dreamed of escape. Cultural hegemony might dominate our days, but it didn't have to be our destiny. We thought we might be able to sustain in virtual space the cultural autonomy we were losing in physical space. We knew that wouldn't be enough. The struggle wouldn't be won or lost in the realm of representation, but as always it had to start there. It was the beginning of media activism. We understood that if we changed the media we'd change the world. I refer you to my call to arms in the journal Radical Software, Summer 1970.15

Media activists saw a utopian opportunity to create a democratic media commons through operational inversion of the broadcast, from mass communication to group conversation.

A paradigm shift was technically possible — from the dominator model to a partnership model, from hierarchy to heterarchy, from communication to conversation, from control to coherence.

Conversation, from the Latin to turn around together, is generative. It brings forth worlds. It's how we construct realities. We can talk about things because, by turning around together, we create the things we talk about by talking about them. We become a reality-community.

And the circularity, the closure, of turning around together seals our cultural autonomy. We become an autonomous reality-community.

Now, that phrase is actually redundant because there's no other kind of community. Every community is an autonomous reality-community. That is, every community is a conspiratorial conversation that generates the realities which define it as a community. Word of mouth becomes a world of mouth, the birth of a notion.

I use this otherwise unnecessary phrase to make us aware of what we're doing today. To make explicit the fact that, in our migration to the Internet, we are decentralizing and pluralizing the social construction of realities at politically destabilizing scale. Every website, blog or microblog; every networking or sharing platform; every streaming or hosting service; every virtual world is either a reality-community or a platform that supports conversations that constitute them. Every Facebook or LinkedIn connection, every tagged Twitter micropost, every You Tube or Vimeo channel, every image posted on Flickr, every playlist shared on Spotify, and every grouping in each of them creates the possibility of a conversation that coheres a community around a reality.

Optical fiber was on the horizon in the early 1970s, and that allowed us to imagine communication systems beyond the limitations of cable television. Instead of the "public access" crumbs tossed to us by the cable TV industry, we imagined socialized public utilities based on switched optical fiber networks operated by telephone companies. I refer you to the video of me calling for a national information utility in 1974.

I was demanding the impossible, and that was the point. Impossible because a utility is a common carrier, open to everyone equally. That would subvert social control. The people would have to demand it. They weren't going to demand something they couldn't envision, so I offered a vision of a public communication utility with emotional bandwidth, which at the time was the six megahertz analog bandwidth of broadcast television. In other words, two-way video would be the platform for democratic conversation at scale.

Information storage and retrieval, although essential, was seen as a secondary, supplemental feature of the communication system that media activists were imagining. Nobody thought of the computer as a communication device. It was just a library in a box. It was access to information, and a communication revolution isn't about access to information, at least not primarily. It's about access to people. It's about access to conversations through which realities are socially constructed.

Operational inversion of the broadcast would give full-throated release to the scream we call silence. We were in solitary confinement. There was an urgent need to say what we had not been able to say, to an audience we never had — ourselves. Dark fiber would light up quickly. Channels of agitation and desire would multiply exponentially, turning the audience-nation into a democratic republic of autonomous reality-communities in virtual space. They would be atopias — social formations without boundaries or borders, defined not by geography but by consciousness, ideology and desire.

It would be necessary to choose among them. You couldn't just passively receive. You'd have to work at it. From the ever-expanding universe of reality-communities, you'd have to assemble the particular universe of meaning in which you would live. It would be your media lifeworld. Lifeworld is a sociological term which means our subjective experience of everyday life. We share the lifeworld with others, but we experience only our own personal lifeworld from moment to moment. The lifeworld is your world, the world you inhabit. It's your habitat.

So you'd assemble your media habitat, your personal lifeworld of autonomous reality-communities. It was understood that one of the possible lifeworlds you might build for yourself could be what we call a counterculture — a world whose meanings, values and definitions of reality are exactly counter to those of the broadcast. You could increasingly live the life of that world as The Build progressed, and it would bring you to the threshold of secession.

The implications of the myth are best understood by looking at where we are today. Three worldhistoric events converge: ecological holocaust, capitalist globalization, the rise of the Internet. Any one of them would throw civilization into crisis; together they constitute a challenge that may well be insurmountable. The fate of the Internet will decide that. The Internet enables utopian democracy or totalitarian tyranny; the latter is inevitable if we don't rise up to prevent it; if we don't, apocalypse is guaranteed. If by some miracle we do manage to free the Internet, we'll at least have a chance to find out what creating at scale might mean.

• Leveraging the miracle is not entirely out of the question. The digital condition is beyond the wildest utopian dreams of 20th century media activism. It has created an eighth continent that is no more imaginary than America itself. It's a revolutionary social metamedium, and millions of reality-communities are rising up on its phantom topology. They're multiplying exponentially and we're busy selecting among them, assembling our lifeworlds.

¹⁵ Gene Youngblood. "The Videosphere." Radical Software, (Summer 1970), pp. 1-2.

As a result, the communication revolution that can't be allowed to happen is sort of actually happening. The utopian myth has almost become reality. The technological infrastructure is in place. Operationally, the Internet is the inverse of the broadcast. Group conversation is replacing mass communication, and the social construction of realities is being decentralized and pluralized.

The broadcast is imploding under corporate supervision. Its imperial speech is dissolving into a constellation of conversations where there's no mainstream, just islands in the stream. The parasocial is surrounded by the social. It's the end of mass media and the social control that's based on it. Consensual hegemony has had its run; the return to classic totalitarianism begins. The architecture of tyranny is in place. The good hegemon is unmasked, truth-telling and dissent are criminalized, show trials are staged, the panopticon rises over the eighth continent.

The potential for radical democracy has never been so close, and, for that reason, so far away. Nevertheless, in The Build there is reason for guarded optimism.

Eighty years ago, in his book Technics and Civilization, Lewis Mumford referred to the industrial revolution of the 18th century as the paleotechnic era. 16 Forty-three years ago, in my book Expanded Cinema, I characterized emerging electronic technologies as the paleocybernetic era. ¹⁷ Today the digital condition inaugurates a new history. It's year zero, and the paleocybernetic begins again.

We live in the paleocybernetic and paleosocial narrowband stage of the Internet's evolution. Paleocybernetic and narrowband because the Internet in America is not a socialized public utility with the emotional bandwidth we need to cultivate radical will at scale. Paleosocial because social networking at its current evolutionary stage is about organizing, not cultivating. Organizing will and ideas that already exist, not systematically cultivating the radical will that's so desperately needed.

The build that could enable that has begun, but it's unconscious, unfocused, chaotic. We're doing it without unified vision, without common cause. Secession is the vision and the cause that can unite us all. We need to wake up and realize that. We're building a secession environment; if we tell ourselves we're doing it, we'll do it better. To understand a thing you must first name it, so the build must become The Build.

It means creating an environment that makes secession and resocialization possible at scale. It means optimizing the commons for decolonizing our minds and cultivating radical will. It means producing content for countercultural lifeworlds as technologies of the self, habitats that enable strategic countersocialization. It means systematically subverting the imperatives of social control.

Nothing but indifference prevents us from doing this. We can delink the chain in the brain and commence a massive cultural cleansing. We're contaminated by the broadcast, but we can disinfect ourselves, purge ourselves, do our mental hygiene, remove the scum. We can conspire to systematically dis-identify with the American Imaginary, to willfully estrange ourselves from the master signifier.

Corporate enclosure and government surveillance notwithstanding, the only relevant question is, "What can I put on my screen?" We all know there's no limit to the lifeworlds we can assemble from legacy media and the infinite cardinality of the cyber-Aleph. 18 There may be a crisis of journalism but there's no crisis of awareness. Thanks to amateur witness, we're more aware than ever.

We are what our attention is. A core imperative of social control is that the audience-nation's attention must always be on the dominators, not on us. The Build can reverse that. We can preach to the choir at scale, a privilege reserved only for the dominators, for the inculcation of compliance. To whom, after all, does the broadcast speak? "A great newspaper is a nation talking to itself," said playwright Arthur Miller. The broadcast preaches nonstop to its congregation of consumers, and the audiencenation obediently conspires in the cant. We're caught in the invariant loops of a calamitous call and response that can't be acknowledged.

In the interest of social control, the very idea of preaching to the converted at any scale must be discredited. This core dynamic must be dismissed as unnecessary, a waste of time; it must be seen as misapplied evangelizing, misdirected exhortation. Well, if preaching to the choir is such a waste of time the dominators should encourage it. If it only creates a false sense of accomplishment they should give us all the room we need to delude ourselves.

When I was a young teenager in the 1950s, nonconformist rebels without a cause were ridiculed for conforming to nonconformism. As if that was some kind of ironic contradiction, when in fact it's the whole point. We should be so misguided as to conform to a nonconformism as subversive as secession. So let us preach to our secessionist choirs on the same scale as the broadcast preaches to the audience-nation, and we'll see if it's a waste of time.

Secessionists understand that preaching to the converted isn't unnecessary persuasion, it's essential for cohesion. It's not about creating, it's about sustaining. It doesn't convince those who already believe, it affirms the belief. We do it not for recruitment but for self-recognition. It seals our autonomy and renders us visible to ourselves.

• That's the great threat to power: the possibility of scaled repetition of counter-narratives in autonomous, self-validating reality-communities. The menace to power is the scale of a robust counter-recursion, a never-ending reiteration of the radical. It's the specter of mass exodus from their regime of ideological loops to one that cancels it, seceding from their ocean of semantic redundancy to swim in a counter-current. The Build enables that. We can slam the door of the broadcast's echo chamber and throw open a million radical resonators to replace it. So put your secession media on endless repeat and let them run.

Secession isn't burying your head in the sand or putting on blinders. On the contrary, to leave the culture is to see for the first time that which has been invisible to you, because what's everywhere is nowhere. You have to leave it to see it, and to truly see is to see what's not there, to notice the presence of an absence.

Secession reveals the ecology of the unseen. You step outside the radius of affliction to see what the broadcast systematically excludes. You peer into the emptiness of the master signifier and you realize America has never been American. That's a liberating disillusionment. You're disabused of illusions that are necessary for social control. You see the false as false, and you're ashamed of what you see. Something is lost, and that brings a sadness, which leads to estrangement that encourages critical thinking. At this point, you've seceded. You're decolonized. Of course no one is completely clean. The stain is indelible. But so what? You're clean enough.

This isn't theory; it's my life. I seceded from Broadcast America years ago and I've lived ever since in a world that negates it. Everything I have said about the ecological holocaust, about capitalism and the end of democracy, about the fate of America, I learned in my media lifeworld. If you lived there all these years, you'd have the same understandings and the same burning desire for secession. If one can do this, all can do it. Secession for one is secession for all.

¹⁶ Lewis Mumford. Technics and Civilization. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1931.

¹⁷ Gene Youngblood. Expanded Cinema. New York: EP Dutton and Co., 1970.

¹⁸ Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Cardinality is the number of elements in a set. In set theory, the aleph glyph is the symbol for the cardinality of infinite sets. That's why Jorge Luis Borges chose The Aleph as the title for his short story describing a point in space that contains all other points in space — a set with infinite elements, just like the Internet. "Cyber-Aleph" is my homage to Borges in the city of his birth. Apart from that, I do think it's an evocative figure for the Internet and its Imaginary, the eighth continent.

At a certain point, I realized I could leave the theater of the audience-nation. I could do more than sever; I could secede. I could hand back the ticket with a defiant flourish. Better yet, I could tear it to pieces and throw it in their face — I could use my insurgent habitat as an incubator of radical will to shut the theater down. Building on the estrangement intrinsic to secession, I could commence a daily practice of strategic counter-socialization. I could conceive a rigorous discipline, like a meditation practice, to summon wild desire. All I had to do was get conscious about what I was going through. It disclosed six strategies:

- 1. Break your heart repeatedly
- 2. Cultivate feelings of impotence and futility
- Become outraged, filled with righteous anger. 3.
- 4. Confront your fear
- 5. Free yourself from hope
- Turn outrage into the rage of radical will and channel it into The Build. You are kindling awaiting the spark in an incendiary situation the global ecosocial crisis.

Tactics for implementing these strategies are the subject of our seminar tomorrow. What lifeworlds will enable us to negotiate the nontrivial passage through these radicalizing maneuvers? What do we put on our screens to break our hearts and keep them broken? What visions do we display to make our spirits soar? How can our lifeworlds embolden us to confront our fear? What tactics do we employ to become hope-free?

I offer my practice as a model and my lifeworld as a template. I'm trying to start The Build that needs all of us to accomplish. I want to inspire you, encourage you, and enlist you in the nontrivial campaign to make secession trivial. If we work hard, others won't have to. They'll just boot up strategic lifeworlds and surreptitiously alienate themselves from this alien nation until Broadcast America is a distant rumor.

Art and artists are central to The Build. One can imagine the rise of legendary curators renowned for the power of their lifeworlds, at once exalted and gut wrenching. The self you construct from that emotional bandwidth may not be a work of art, but you'll be a piece of work — in the crosshairs of the panopticon, of course, but so what? There aren't enough jails if we do it at scale.

I work at this ten hours a day, seven days a week, and I'm laying it in your lap. 19 I'm handing you the secession algorithm. I'm calling your bluff, pushing you against the wall of your apathy and indifference, because secession isn't optional. Not to secede, now that you can, is terminal hypocrisy. You don't admit the culture is lethal and then refuse to leave it when such an impossible thing becomes possible. When an opportunity like this presents itself, a person of conscience doesn't hesitate. Given the tyranny and chaos on the horizon, the only acceptable response is to throw yourself into The Build with ferocious dedication.

We have no choice but to use the paleocybernetic narrowband Internet at its current level of enclosure and surveillance to inaugurate The Build. We have to use the privatized Internet to cultivate demand for a socialized Internet. The only way that can succeed is through a general strike at the world-stopping scale the digital condition makes possible. "World" may only mean America, but we do have the precedent of global protest I invoked at the beginning. What we want now is the opposite: empty streets on the seven continents, raging traffic on the eighth.

Yes, the likelihood of all this is close to zero; nevertheless, I believe it must happen if we are to create on the same scale as we can destroy. If the odds fall to zero, let the record show that this breathtaking opportunity stood before us and we shrugged it off. Whatever path we choose, it's not going to be a pleasant journey. Even so, the struggle for freedom is always inspiring and ennobling; if we don't succeed, we'll at least go down fighting the fight that, if it were successful, would be the greatest turn in human history. We owe to ourselves, to our children, and to all living things the noble audacity to demand the impossible.

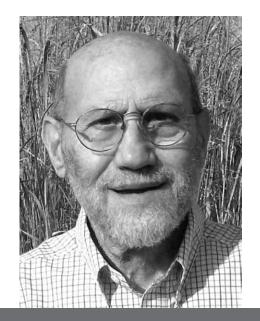
This article is adapted from a lecture and seminar Gene Youngblood presented in November 2012 at the Biennale of the Moving Image at Universidad Nacional De Tres De Febrero in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

19 My wife, Jane Youngblood, is a faithful co-conspirator in this enterprise; her critiques of, and contributions to, this lecture and its adaptation were invaluable.

Gene Youngblood is an internationally known theorist of Media Arts and politics, and a scholar of alternative cinemas. His Expanded Cinema (1970), the first book to consider video as an art form, was seminal in establishing Media Arts as a recognized artistic and scholarly discipline. Youngblood is also widely known as a pioneering voice in the media democracy movement; Secession From the Broadcast, a book and documentary on the subject, are currently in production.



IN MEMORIAM



JUD YALKUT (1938 - 2013)

Shortly after Jud Yalkut died in July I came across an audio file that he had given me, an interview he'd conducted with Storm De Hirsch in 1972 on his WBAI radio program "Inner Cinema." Hearing Jud and Storm's silky and mellow voices transported me back to a lovely day having tea at Jud's Ohio house during one of Storm's visits there from New York. It must have been in 1978 or '79. I was a year or two into my first teaching job, at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, and still in awe of film icons like Storm and Jud. I couldn't believe the good fortune that allowed me to share this intimate moment with them. The two artists discussed their interest in creating transcendent experiences through image transformation, an approach misleadingly labeled "psychedelic." Jud was quick to point out that "psychedelic" actually means "mind manifesting" and that he viewed the movie screen as a plane on which dreams take place.

I recall more about that day in Ohio - my amazement upon entering Jeni Engel's and Jud's chaotic, eclectic surroundings where techno-media equipment, videotapes, Persian rugs, electronic gear, artifacts of Eastern mysticism, and herbs of all types were piled to the ceiling. I felt like I was in his Destruct Film environment of mandalas, spinning projections, and the apparatus of every media format that had been invented to date.

Jud's route to Ohio started in the Bronx and his auspicious beginnings at the High School of Music and Art, hanging out at Cinema 16, entering City College of New York as a math/physics major at 15, having been told that the jobs of the future were in nuclear physics. He led a life of adventure that would thrill anybody: studying poetry at McGill where his fraternity brother Leonard Cohen may have convinced him to switch majors to English Lit, associating with Allen Ginsberg and Wavy Gravy in New York, with subsequent travel to San Francisco and Big Sur where, he said, he wrote the last poem of his life. All this before the age of 20 when, back in New York, he took up filmmaking when he received an 8mm camera from a wellmeaning friend. Jud became a friend and collaborator of Nam June Paik, Yayoi Kusama, Lou Harrison, Terry Riley, and John Cage as well as an influential member of USCO, performing light shows at Warhol's Plastic Inevitable.

David Neal Lewis, Ohio filmmaker, writer and composer, told me that Jud felt abandoned by his circle of friends after separating from his popular first wife, so in 1973, after 14 years in New York, he jumped at the offer to teach experimental filmmaking in Ohio. Jud's friend, Ben Britton, recalls that Jud took on this offer to teach experimental filmmaking as a bodhisattva (an enlightenment being) to champion filmmaking as art, an activity he performed with generosity and enthusiasm for four decades. Charles Woodman, now a media artist and teacher at U. of Cincinnati, clearly recalls his first encounter with Jud's work in a café in Yellow Springs 35 years ago, when Jud's film China Cat Sunflower's synchronicity of image and Grateful Dead music created an effect that was "electric" and proved to him "just how film can be magic."

Both a revolutionary idealist and a renaissance man, Jud said of himself: "I've been a beat, I've been a hippie, I've been whatever you want to call me, but I've been the same person throughout the whole thing."

"It's surprising we don't think of death more often," poet-filmmaker James Broughton was fond of saying. "Death is always thinking of us." Jud's signature appears as a witness on the document citing my last will and testament — a circumstance, that in some strange way, bonds him to my future death. It seems somehow incongruous that he has died and I am alive.

JANIS CRYSTAL LIPZIN

IMAGE Jud Yalkut, Self Portrait (2013). Courtesy University of Dayton.